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My Sister Sophie

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JOSEPHINE EDGAR

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MY SISTER SOPHIE

She came in on Woodbourne's arm, like an actress taking the limelight, knowing full well that every eye there was fixed upon her. She wore the thin black and white suit, the white hat with the black wing, a high-boned blouse of white lace falling in snowy ruffles, pinned by a diamond brooch. Her small white-gloved hands held a black and scarlet parasol. She glanced round the paddock, talking to Woodbourne, smiling, laughing with the well-dressed, fashionable young men who followed them. There was no other woman in that party.

When Sophie saw Brendan the sparkle left the pretty face. For a moment she lost all animation, watching the tall, handsome young man leading the horse. Something, a movement in the crowd, set the thoroughbred dancing, and Brendan moved with it, pulling down the jerking head, soothing and quietening it, horse and man a picture of grace and strength.

Woodbourne spoke to her, and she started, and replied, and whatever she said set all the men around her off in a gust of laughter, and she was all sparkling and smiling again; but I knew that for a moment I had seen behind the mask my sister wore, the mask of gaiety and worldliness and brash disregard for conventions. I had seen, just for a moment, a young woman looking at a man with her heart in her eyes.

Also by the same author,
and available in Coronet Books:

The Dark Tower
Time of Dreaming

My Sister Sophie

Josephine Edgar

CORONET BOOKS
Hodder Paperbacks Ltd., London

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First published in Great Britain 1964
by William Collins and Sons Co Ltd
Coronet edition 1974

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Printed and bound in Great Britain
for Coronet Books, Hodder Paperbacks Ltd,
St Paul's House, Warwick Lane, London, EC4P 4AH
by Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), Ltd,
Bungay, Suffolk

ISBN 0 340 18784 0

CHAPTER ONE

WHEN I look back on all that happened, one of the saddest things about it all is that I can only just remember my sister Sophie looking young. That must have been when I was ten and she was about eighteen.

It was a few years before the turn of the century, and our mother was still alive. Sophie was working in the free-and-easies, the big public houses where an entertainment was given two or three nights a week. It was my father, of course, who had got her into this line, for it was his line. At ten I believed that he really was a good comedian, and really was on the stage. It was not until after Mother died that I realised that he was just a no-good lay-about—handsome in his day, a petty gambler, hanging round the big racing mobsters, pleasant to anyone for the price of a drink.

I never saw my father after my fourteenth birthday, and I doubt whether Sophie ever did—at any rate she never mentioned him. He was a man, and to her all men were enemies to be captured, and exploited, and discarded when they were of no further use. In Sophie's code a woman might sell her body, but must never surrender her heart; and our father—cruel to us because he was vain, weak and self-deluding—was one of the reasons why she thought like this. I have heard recently that he died down-and-out in one of the East End flophouses. It is years, now, since it all happened, and I am grown up, and married, and living in a far country, and I can only remember him as a noisy menace, the only person in my whole life who ever struck me; but still, he was my father, and when I heard how he had died I said a prayer in my heart for him, and for all the sadness and anxiety of those times.

My mother had 'married beneath her', as they say. It was an elopement, and her family never saw her again. She had a small income, about £120 a year, entailed, and this kept us just above the real poverty line. We belonged to 'the genteel poor', who because of their hereditary refinements are supposed to suffer more than the real poor, though I believe they only suffer in a different way. We lived between Hackney and Dalston, in a damp little villa which had once been in the country but had long since been swallowed up by the factories and railway arches of the East End.

If my father had ever seriously worked, I suppose we might have been fairly comfortable; but as it was, apart from those rare occasions when he won some money, he was always scrounging, threatening and stealing from Mother. When he was in the house there were always rows, and they were always about money. I can remember Sophie saying when my mother died, 'Bad luck it wasn't t'other way round—we could do without Father!'

The other member of the household was my Aunt Min, my father's aunt, a hard-working little body who went out to one of the factories during the day and did the housework in the evening because my mother was too ill to do anything.

When Sophie was about sixteen Father got her her first chance as a singer at a pub called The Sining Birds, a new place glittering with engraved glass and polished mahogany. She had a pretty voice, true and pure, and she knew a bit about singing because at home in the evenings Mother used to play the piano and we would all join in. Sophie was a beautiful tall girl with the yellow curling hair that we both got from our mother, and truly blue eyes, the colour of a patch of blue sky between her dark lashes. She had a way with men, too, teasing and mischievous, whey she sang a song, making them laugh at her in the indulgent way they would laugh at a saucy, forward child.

Soon she was getting bookings all round east and north-east London, singing at two or three pubs each night. The house paid her a few shillings, and some of the customers gave her

tips when they felt flush, but mostly they bought her drinks. She would always ask for gin, then the barman would fill her glass up with water, and when she left would give her a percentage of what the customer had spent on her. But I, of course, knew nothing about this side of it then—I just thought it exciting and glamorous. To think she only had to look pretty —to stand up and sing a song and make sometimes as much as a guinea in an evening! I had no idea what the public-house singing halls were like, and I thought my mother silly to hate her doing it. 'You must never do it, Rose,' she would say, 'no matter what your father says. I'm in terror every night thinking of my girl among that pack of wolves.'

When she was about eighteen Sophie picked up with a young fellow who used to play her accompaniments. He was called André, and was a Frenchman I think. He used to call for her and take her to her engagements and bring her back, and at that time even Mother and Aunt Min relaxed a bit, and Sophie's eyes shone with happiness. I remember he was nice-looking, and dark, and different from anyone she had ever met, and I remember how pretty and young she was. And then he did not come any more, and she got pale and scared-looking. She was ill for a little while, and Mother cried and Aunt Min worked very hard and tut-tutted a lot, a sure sign of anxiety with her. After that, Sophie changed, and the bonny blue eyes never laughed but were like cold blue windows in her beautiful face, through which she looked speculatively at the world.

Except when she looked at me. For me there was always kindness. I would lie in the double bed where we slept, listening to the street noises outside—frightening street noises sometimes: a fight, or a woman screaming, a baby crying endlessly —waiting for the sound of the cab bringing Sophie home; then I would sit up in bed and light the candle to see her come glimmering in to me. She would wind her arms round me in the warm dark and weave dreams of the wonderful life I should have one day. 'Nothing of this sort for you, Rose,' she would say. 'You're going to be a real toff. Everything roses for my little Rose.'

Once, after the French boy had gone, and she was better, I said in the dark, sleepily, 'Why doesn't André come any more, Sophie?'

I felt her soft body go tense, and she said, 'Love isn't for the likes of us, Rose. Love is for rich people. People in love are fools, Rosie. They want to give everything. That's a mug's game. You be on the receiving end—taking, not giving.' She gave a shivering little sigh, so sad, so different from her bitter voice. 'This world is made for men, and a woman is fighting for everything she wants, and she's got nothing to fight with—except herself.'

'I don't know what you're talking about,' I said sleepily. 'Tell me about the house with the marble staircase and the carriage with two black horses that we shall have one day.' And she laughed, and kissed me, and went on with her Cinderella story of riches and luxury until I fell asleep and dreamed of Sophie dressed entirely in diamonds, shooting down armies of soldiers with a golden gun.

Looking back, I suppose I must have been a pretty incongruous figure in the East End streets in those days. Even when Sophie was getting regular engagements there was very little money. All my clothes were cut-down from hers, and my rough serge dress and stuff jacket were shabby enough, but I was always neat and clean and well-mended, and my long, waist-length fair hair was neatly plaited. And even more incongruous was the round felt hat I wore, in a district where most girls were bareheaded or wore a grubby shawl or kerchief tied over their hair.

At that time I was going, as Sophie had done, to a small private school near Hackney Marshes, for which my mother paid a few shillings a week. I learned to read and write, and we read the Scriptures. But the apprehensive widow who ran the school was not really equipped to teach children over ten. I'd probably have had a sounder education at the church school with its crowded classrooms smelling of unwashed young bodies and carbolic; but my mother, governess-educated, fought against our going to school with the rough,

common children who played in the streets around our home, and she was always distressed by Sophie's flat London accent, which she never lost.

In my fourteenth year, my mother died. She had been ill for as long as I could remember, and I had thought she would just always go on being there, rather ill. When I was older I often wondered what her illness had been, and whether she really had been ill all those years, or whether her weakness was perhaps a protection, and the horsehair sofa in the corner, on which she had always lain, night and day, a sort of lair where she could stay safely, away from my father.

My mother had never slept upstairs with my father after I was born, and I can still see her lovely, thin, worn face go sick with loathing at the sound of his boisterous voice or unsteady step in the hall. When she died he did not come home at all for a week. Aunt Min said sentimentally that he could not face life without her, but Sophie said grimly, 'Without her money you mean!'—for Mother's meagre income reverted to her family on her death, and now we only had what Sophie earned from singing, and Aunt Min from the factory. 'If he thinks he's getting any of my money for his horses or his women or his booze,' Sophie said crisply, 'he's mistaken'—and she smoothed the cheap black material of her mourning dress with her pretty white hand on which a cheap ring glittered. She had a lot of admirers now, and our room was bursting with flowers and trinkets and bon-bons. Aunt Min gave her a warning glance, indicating me, but Sophie said, 'Rose's coming fourteen! She must know what he is.' Aunt Min said, 'Now, Sophie, after all he's your father,' but Sophie only laughed in that cold derisive way that I couldn't bear, it seemed so ugly coming from such a lovely person.

When, after the funeral, my father returned home, he and Sophie were locked immediately in an unrelenting struggle. She would not give him a penny of her earnings for himself, nor would she allow Aunt Min to do so, though I know that kindly soul would often give him a shilling or two to avoid trouble. He was being pushed out, and he knew it, and he

could see no mercy in Sophie's blue eyes. He was afraid, and his fear alternated between whining importunity and a bullying, smouldering rage; and the day I was fourteen it was to blow into a fury, and to blow Sophie and Aunt Min and me out of the scrubby cottage in Hackney for ever.

That night I had raced home from school, because Sophie was buying me a present and Aunt Min was making a cake. It was my first birthday since Mother's death, and I suppose they wanted to make it as nice as possible.

It was nice, too. Sophie had had a warm jacket made for me from a piece of red cloth she had bought, and had had it trimmed with some fur belonging to my mother. There was a decent fire, and the tea was laid, and the cake had my name on it in icing, and Sophie had changed her black dress for the pretty blue one she sang in, and Aunt Min was beaming and her funny, kind old face was getting scarlet as she toasted muffins at the fire. It was all cosy, warm, safe and right—the first time, and the last time, for many years.

We had had our tea and I was trying my lovely red jacket on again, when we heard my father's step in the hall. We all exchanged apprehensive and resigned glances, accepting the fact that our cosy evening was spoiled.

Sophie was singing at a music-hall in Southwark that evening and would leave home about six o'clock. A music-hall was a step up from the free-and-easies and a bit more money, and I understood that this was owing to the influence of someone called Dan Brady whom Sophie and Aunt Min talked about endlessly. Listening avidly I learned he was some years older than Sophie, that he had plenty of money and was the giver of many expensive presents, that he was crazy about her and wanted to marry her. Aunt Min thought of this as a good thing, but Sophie only with speculative amusement.

When we heard Father come in we sat and waited, wondering what sort of mood he would be in, for according to how long or how much he had been drinking his moods would vary from the aggressively belligerent to maudlin sentimentality, and we had to vary our strategy to suit these moods. There had

been no real scene since my mother had died, because Sophie simply ignored him. But this night he thrust the door open and stood looking at us; and I was suddenly very afraid, for I knew that on this night he was desperate.

'I've got to have some money, Sophie,' he said. 'I've got to have some money now.'

She did not even look up at him, and he dragged a chair from the table and dropped down on it; pushing his face near to hers. Once he had been a tall, handsome man, but now he was a sodden wreck. She did not draw back, or shrink, or cry out as my mother would have done. The beautiful blue eyes lifted slowly and looked with cold dislike into the face so near hers, and it was he who shrank as though he had received a blow.

Meanwhile Aunt Min's hard, work-worn hand crept into mine ready to make our escape, and I remember my eyes were full of tears because all the birthday joy had gone.

My father wasn't whining, pleading or bullying tonight. His need was too great. Habitual liar that he was, for once he was speaking the truth.

'Sophie, I owe Jake Helner twenty pounds. I've got to have it tonight or else they'll get at me. I've got to have it tonight!'

'I haven't got twenty pounds,' she said.

'But you can get twenty pounds, Sophie,' he said eagerly. 'Dan Brady would give you that and more if you asked him. You can't fool me. I know Dan's crazy for you—I even hear he wants to marry you.' Sophie's eyes moved sharply to Aunt Min's and away again.

'I'm not asking Dan Brady for money for you,' she said. 'Ask him for it yourself.'

'I'm telling you, Sophie, they'll smash me if I don't pay by tonight.'

'You should have thought of that before you gambled with money you hadn't got.'

'But Dan'll give it you. I know he will. Am I to be half-killed because you won't ask for it?'

She rose to her feet, and said sharply, 'I told you I won't! I

don't ask favours from anyone, and I'm not going to ask them for you. It's our Rosie's birthday. Leave us in peace.'

He lost his head completely. Sophie had made a mistake mentioning me by name, because it turned his drunken attention to me. He called us both filthy names, and when Aunt Min tried to intervene, pushed her aside so she fell against the table, knocking china over on to the floor.

'So it's her birthday? The fine young lady! There's always money for her, like there was when your mother was alive, but never a bloody ha'penny for me! Money for clothes and for schools for an idle little bitch who ought to be out earning! You all fancy yourselves as a cut above me. Well, let me tell you I'm your father, and I can turn you out into the streets if I want to, and I shall! I don't want you here—you're no use to me. . . .'

He saw my new red coat and picked it up. I cried out in protest and he turned on me. Seeing the look on my face, he tried to tear the coat, so I flung myself on it, suddenly as savage as he was in fighting for what was mine—for if Sophie and I looked like our mother, there was a lot of our father in us too. He struck me hard across the face so that my head snapped back, and for a moment everything burst with light.

I knew no more until I woke up with my head against Sophie's shoulder, a cold wet rag against my forehead, my jaw and head throbbing with pain.

'She's coming round,' said Aunt Min, and she helped Sophie lift me to the sofa.

I lay there watching Sophie. She went back to the ruined tea table and sat with her hand round the base of the lamp, the yellow light illuminating her white, beautiful face with its crown of curling golden hair. Afterwards Aunt Min told me she had picked the lamp up and told my father that she'd set him on fire and the house with it unless he left me alone.

There was no sign of my father. Aunt Min began to pick up the broken crockery and set the room to rights. 'He'll be back,' she said wearily. She spoke to Sophie's averted golden head and slim, blue-clad shoulders.

'Yes, he'll be back all right.'

'It is true Dan Brady wants to marry you?'

Sophie turned her head then, her mouth a thin hard line, her blue eyes mocking. 'Supposing it is?'

'You might do a lot worse,' Aunt Min said stolidly. 'He's got plenty of money, and he's been pretty good to you.'

'Good?' said Sophie disparagingly. 'He's no different from the rest of them. He offers legal payment instead of a lot of swindling lies, that's all. *Men*—they're all the same!'

She rose and began to pin on her hat, saying over her shoulder, 'Put your coat on, Rose, we're going out.'

'Where?'

'Where do you think? I'm singing at the Wellington, Marsh side. I'll take you with me. We can't stay here, that's certain. I promised our mother I'd look after you and I shall.'

She helped me into my coat, and tied a scarf about my bruised face, and said to Aunt Min, 'Get our things packed up—yours as well—and keep them out of his sight. He won't hurt you, he knows you've no money to give him. I'll send for you as soon as I've got somewhere to go. Maybe tonight.'

I felt more dead than alive walking through the dark streets. My face and head ached as though I had toothache in every tooth in my head, but Sophie walked quickly, holding my hand tightly in hers. When we got to the main road she hailed a passing cab and told the driver to take us to the Old Wellington, Southwark.

It was the first time I had ever driven in a cab, and I was so impressed by my sister's self-confidence in summoning it, and the way she spoke to the driver, that I almost forgot my headache. I could see he was impressed too, and not just by her golden beauty under the lamplight. She had that quality rare in women, of being perfectly capable of looking after herself.

We jingled along westward, down Old Street, and then south through the mean streets round Clare Market and out into the Strand. It was just theatre time, and the cab was held up by the crush of carriages drawing up at the theatres. There was one theatre with the word 'Frivolity' up in lights over the

entrance, and Sophie said suddenly:

'That's the Frivolity. The girls there can have the pick of the town. The mashers wait for them like bees round honey. Last week one of them married a lord.' She added dryly, 'but then they're ladies, or make out to be.'

We crossed Waterloo Bridge—the river was black and gleaming under the lights—then into mean streets among railway bridges again, and the cab stopped before another theatre. I suppose it was a second-rate music-hall in a poor part of the town, but to me it was fabulous. On the bill outside I read, 'Sophie Eves, A Song and a Smile'. It was in very small letters at the bottom of the bill, but it seemed wonderful to me.

Sophie paid off the cab and we went inside through the front door, not through the stage entrance. When we went straight past the box-office the man in evening-dress nodded, and said, 'Evening, Sophie.' I felt as proud as a peacock, but very self-conscious because of my face all wrapped up under the scarf. It didn't hurt so much now, but it felt all puffy and tender, and a glimpse in one of the enormous mirrors told me I looked a perfect fright.

I had never been in such a place before. It seemed to me all gilt and red velvet and lights. The show had not yet begun, but a band was playing. At the back of the seats there was a terrace, with an almost continuous bar running right round, backed with engraved mirrors and stacked with glasses and bottles, and there were pretty girls standing behind it to serve. On the terrace, along the walls, which were painted with lakes and palaces and mountains, there were red-velvet settees and chairs, and marble-topped tables, at which a lot of ladies sat, or walked up and down, smiling at the men who were leaning against the bar, talking over their drinks. All these ladies seemed to me to be splendidly dressed, with such high-swept hair and red lips and feathered hats and jewels that Sophie, although she was prettier than any of them, looked rather shabby in her dark coat and plain black sailor hat.

She marched straight through until she came to the very back of the horse-shoe bar, where there was a group of men

who seemed somehow different from the other men present. Their clothes were loud but expensive, their grey derbies tipped to an aggressively masculine attitude and there was something about their stance, and the shape of them, that was taut and strong. There was a very small, long-faced man, not as tall as me, yet his shoulders were as strong as his waist was tiny, and he only came up to the waist of a great black man with a flattened nose, a nearly white derby on his cropped head and a diamond the size of a farthing winking and shining in his striped cravat. The men had their backs to the bar, talking loudly among themselves, pleased with themselves I thought, their conversation punctuated by roars of laughter. They were the Fancy. The sort of men you always see where the strength and skill of the body become professional—taut, male, coarse, attractive men with braced muscles and confident, aggressive faces, the angle of their hats a challenge. To me they were not very unusual. If men were well-dressed or well-off round our way, this was usually the type they were, apart from the traders and publicans. This was the type of man my father tried to emulate. Their talk was all of man-flesh and horse-flesh, of money and gaming, in a slang that was almost a language of its own. My father had their coarseness without their courage.

'Sit down there,' said Sophie, and she pushed me down on a red-velvet settee by a marble-topped table and sat down beside me.

'When are you going to sing?' I asked.

'Oh, in about half an hour,' she said. She beckoned to a waiter, and he came across smiling.

'Miss Sophie?'

'Tell Dan Brady I'm here and want to speak to him.'

There were two men, obviously brothers, who dominated the group at the bar. One was a heavy, handsome man about thirty-five, with fine, dark-lashed Irish eyes, and a mouth that belied his rather crass coarseness—a man who had lived tough, but who somewhere beneath the exterior was not tough; a mixture of a man. The other was taller, younger, slimmer, with

wide shoulders and the tapered-down waist of a horseman. He was quietly dressed, and though he was of these men, he was somehow detached from them—drinking less, talking less, laughing less, yet modest, not fancying himself their superior. I am telling this through the backward glance of memory, through the eyes of the woman I am now. Then, a girl of fourteen, bruised and tired, yet eager, observant and excited, all I knew was that he was handsome, and I wished myself four years older.

The waiter went across to the older man, and touched his arm and spoke. The man looked across to where Sophia and I sat, and when he saw her his handsome, life-worn face lit up in a way that scared me. It was, I suppose, the first time I had seen anyone completely, uncontrollably and obsessively in love.

Now I realise that if his look had been met with an equal look from her, or even a tenderness of recognition, it would have been different. But she sat there a little way away from me on the red-velvet seat, and her blue eyes were cold and detached. I knew then that he would lay down his life for her, and that if he did she would not care, and I shivered as people do when they say 'a goose has walked over my grave'.

He came across, pulling off the hat he had worn so jauntily, and sat down opposite her. I leant back against the red velvet, and my head felt muzzy. The big yellow-velvet curtain had gone up and the band was beating out one of those tum-ti-tum tunes, and two men in scarlet and gold tights were whirling gold and silver clubs.

Dan put out his hands across the table and took Sophie's. She did not draw away, but sat there looking at him with that strange look of hers, while his eyes seemed to search every inch of her cold lovely face.

Suddenly I could not bear to watch them. I had had too much emotion for one evening. I shut my eyes and pretended to be asleep.

But I could hear their voices. I heard her say, 'All right, Dan Brady, I'll marry you. But be sure about it. Be quite sure

it's what you want.' And I heard his voice catch, as he said, 'Sophie—Sophie,' as though he could not find words to say what he felt.

I opened my eyes again. His head with its thick, curly dark hair was bent over her little hands. He said, and I could hear there were tears in him:

'You'll never regret it, Sophie. You'll never regret it. I'll give you everything you've ever wanted, you'll see. I'll look after the young 'un for you, I promise. I love you more than a chap like me can say. It's a craziness. I'll do anything you say—just promise you'll be true to me, and I'll do anything for you.'

And then I heard her soft, cool voice with its flat little London accent say, 'You wanted to marry me, Dan, and I'm saying yes. But I'm not giving any promises about anything to you, or to any man. If you want me, well, here I am . . . if you don't, well, say so. There are plenty of others who do.'

He said in agony, 'Sophie, don't! Of course I want you, girl. What else have I wanted for twelve months past?' He turned and called to the men at the bar. 'All right!—everybody! . . . Brendan—Jock, Tiger . . . all of you. Sophie's going to marry me. Waiter, champagne!'

All the men at the bar came over, the tall, handsome young brother, whom he had called Brendan, just a little behind the rest. Corks were popping, wine fizzing, and somehow some of the pretty ladies from the near-by tables were mixed up in it and were getting their glasses filled too.

'And is this the little 'un?' Dan Brady shouted, bending over me kindly. There was a smell of cigars, whisky and good scented shaving soap, which I have associated with him ever since—that and his kindness, and his commonness, and his agonising devotion to my sister. 'You look tired, m'dear. Come on now, a glass of champagne, that'll buck you up. One glass won't hurt her, Sophie.'

I sat up, delighted that the tense emotion had gone and that all these exciting people suddenly seemed to be enjoying themselves.

The scarf fell off my yellow hair, and apparently my bruise showed—for Brendan, who had taken the seat next to me, suddenly looked fierce and angry.

'Who the devil did that to her?' he demanded.

'Our dad,' said Sophie, and she met his eyes, and then Dan's; and if she had said out loud to him, 'It's because of this, and not because I love you,' it couldn't have been plainer.

I saw Dan change colour under his ruddy tan as she went on:

'That's why we're here tonight. We're not going back home any more. You'll have to find somewhere for us both to sleep tonight, Dan. That's why I came to you.'

He seemed grateful for her trust, and began at once to make arrangements. We could go to his place at Drovny Street, he said.

'You can have my room,' said Brendan. 'I'll shake down on the settee downstairs in the office. But look. This kid's finished now, Sophie.'

'She'll have to stay here until I finish my act,' said Sophie

'I'll take her home,' said Brendan. 'Can I take your growler Dan? I'll send it back for you and Sophie.'

Dan rose at once and went over to a waiter to give instructions to call his driver, and for a moment Brendan, Sophie and I were alone. Brendan looked at her. There was no devotion in his eyes, as there had been in his brother's, but neither was there indifference. 'You'll be kind to him, Sophie?' he said.

'Kind?' she said incredulously, as though he had spoken in a language she did not understand.

'It won't take much to make him happy, Sophie. Dan's a tough nut—he's had to be, coming up through the fight game as he has. But in some ways he's only a boy. About you, for instance. The sun rises and sets with you, for him. Be good to him. Try to make him happy. He loves you very much.'

'Love?' she said indifferently. 'Happiness? What do they mean, my boyo? They're only words. Dan is getting me, but I can't guarantee his happiness or give him what people call love.'

For a moment Brendan's handsome young face was bleak and angry, and then he looked at me, and smiled. 'There's a soft spot in you somewhere, Sophie Eves, in spite of all your talk. Or why did you bring this young 'un along with you?'

'Why do you think I'm here?' she flamed, suddenly not detached and indifferent, but fierce and protective. 'Do you think I couldn't manage for myself? But our Rose is not having a life like my mother, nor like me. She's going to have her chance and her choice in this damned man's world!'

They were talking over my head as if they had forgotten my presence.

'Look, Sophie. Dan's crazy for you. Don't play him for a fool. He's had a hard time too. I know, because he's made things easy for me. He can be a violent man if he's hurt. There's something in him that breaks and flies. But he's kind. If it's just money you want, he'll help you, he's generous. You don't have to marry him just for that.'

'A handout's no good to me, Brendan boy,' she said coldly. 'I've no real talent. Just the things a woman has to fight with. Me . . .'—she spread out her hands, as though inviting him to look at her prettiness—'I want help over a few years, and I'll pay my dues. Then there's no argument, is there?'

He shrugged helplessly and angrily. It seemed to me that she seemed years older than he, although actually it was only two years, for he was then twenty. Then Dan came back and took her arm, and told Brendan that the carriage was waiting, and Brendan looked at me, and grinned, and picked me up like a kitten, and carried me out to where it was waiting. My head fell against his shoulder as he carried me out, and I could see Dan and Sophie standing there, she in her plain grey stuff coat and little round black hat, watching me go, and he the burly big man looking down on her with such pride of possession and an almost trembling delight.

Brendan lifted me into the carriage, and we jogged off through the streets again. I learned afterwards that this was not Dan's private vehicle but a four-wheeler which he hired exclusively for himself. The journey was a long one, back the

way Sophie and I had come, over the bridge and up towards Islington, but before we came to the bridge I was fast asleep. When I woke I was being lifted out again, and Aunt Min was with us, and a few bits of luggage. We must have been all the way to Hackney and back, to fetch her.

I opened my eyes sleepily against Brendan's shoulder, though indeed the eye that had been hit would hardly open at all. He smiled down at me and said, 'Poor Bunting,' as though I was a baby, but I was too tired to be indignant. I had a brief sleepy impression of a big house among lighted windows that might have been shops or pubs or restaurants, and of being carried across a lighted hall, and up a wide staircase—an impression too of big rooms and a soft, rattling, clicking sound, and then a man's voice calling numbers in French, then up again to another floor, and being put down on a bed which smelt pleasantly of leather. And then I was asleep again.

I woke up next morning in a big bed with Sophie beside me. The room was neat and comfortable, with heavy mahogany furniture, lots of books which were all about racehorses, and who their sires and dams were, back to some equine Adam and Eve, and there were several drawings and paintings of racehorses and jockeys, and there were some riding-boots lined up against the wall. It was Brendan's room. Sophie lay beside me in a tangle of golden hair, her long lashes lying against her pale cheeks. She looked very pretty and very young, her mouth soft and relaxed as it never was when she was awake.

It was light, and in about half an hour Aunt Min came in with a tray with tea and breakfast. This was the first time she had ever done this for us, although she had always waited on Mother, and after this she seemed to slip into her appointed niche. She never went out to work again, but was always with Sophie, always wearing a dark dress with a brooch at the throat, and indoors a spotless white apron, and a white old-fashioned starched cap over her thin black hair. I don't know how old Aunt Min was, and I still don't, but her hair was always, and still is, as black as jet. Brendan once said she must dye it with boot-blacking. Anyway this was the first of hun-

dreds of times she brought us our breakfast to bed.

This began my brief experience of the house in Drovny Street. It was in Soho, a decayed district of big old houses mostly occupied by French people who had come over from the various revolutions in France and settled there.

Brendan worked out at Epsom, and lived out there too, only keeping the room at Drovny Street for when he was in town. But he came during the day and took me out. He used to take me to Hyde Park in the unfashionable hour in the late afternoons, and hire a couple of hacks, and teach me to ride. He took me to the British Museum, and on a steamer on the Thames, and to a matinee to see Miss Ellen Terry, and bought me chocolates. It was like having a tall, handsome elder brother, except that though an elder brother might have made me blush with his teasing, he would not have made my heart bump at his touch. My feelings about the opposite sex, shaped like Sophie's by my father, underwent a sharp reversal. I mooned over Brendan in secret, and was thrilled at sleeping in his leather-smelling, horse-haunted room.

I discovered, wandering about Drovny Street during the day, when Sophie was out shopping, what the house was—at least what the lower floors were, because the two top storeys were Dan's home. It was a gambling house.

During the day it was quiet enough except for the cleaning women, and I would wander about at will. After six o'clock I was not allowed downstairs, but I used to hang about on the landing and peep through the banisters if I could. At six the waiters and porters and the enormous ex-pugilist doorman came, and the chandeliers were lit, and the dust-covers came off the roulette, baccarat and chemin-de-fer tables. In the small salon the buffet and bar were laid out, and then the croupiers would arrive, and at about seven-thirty Dan would go down, burly and handsome in his evening-dress, with a diamond stud, and the big gold chain across his waistcoat. Sophie went down straight away, the first night after we arrived. I don't know whether it was because she wanted to, or because Dan wanted to show her off. It was the first time I

ever saw her in evening clothes. She wore a dress of rose-pink velvet, cut daringly low. She wore a new ring now, a real diamond, and a diamond crescent pinned into the paler chiffons on her breast. She had satin shoes to match her dress, and long pale-pink gloves. Aunt Min and I gaped at her as though she were the Princess of Wales or Mrs. Langtry, and we thought she looked prettier than either of them. I'd have been happy to stay at Drovny Street, and grow up to be there in lovely clothes, and queen it in the gaming-rooms like Sophie. But she had other ideas for me, and it appeared even my beloved Brendan did not think it an ideal environment for an impressionable girl of fourteen.

Sophie and Dan were married by special licence about ten days after we left Hackney. I did not go to the wedding, but Dan took me and Brendan and Aunt Min out with them to lunch afterwards at a restaurant in the Strand called Romano's which was full of well-dressed men and beautiful ladies. Dan was in his element here. Or at least I thought so, until I noticed that one or two people glanced at him in a smiley sort of way, superior and amused, and I realised that Sophie was aware of this, and so was Brendan; but while Sophie was ashamed of him, Brendan did not care a hoot, and smiled at him as though he wanted him to be happy and did not mind how much he showed off. He ordered the best of everything and sent messages to the band to play wedding-tunes. This made Sophie colour up, although when a very smart man at a near-by table raised his glass 'to the bride' she laughed, and raised her glass, and her blue eyes were so inviting that I was glad that Dan was too busy ordering the waiters about to notice. But Brendan noticed all right, for I saw the chill in his eyes and the tightening of his lips.

Aunt Min was stiff as a board at first, in spite of her new bonnet, with the black bugle beads and little osprey feathers, until Brendan teased her into being natural. I had a new dress of blue velvet, and had my hair out of plaits and flowing round my shoulders under a blue hat with a big white rose. I felt very

fine, and was glad the bruise had practically gone from my face.

To sit there eating and drinking and laughing, and thinking that only a few days ago we were in Hackney, poor as mice, and scared stiff of Father—well, it was like one of Sophie's bed-time tales come true. Everyone stared at me, and Brendan explained I was really a bit young for Romanos, although it was not too bad at lunch-time. I said it was glorious and wonderful, and I'd like to eat there every day, and drink champagne every day and be just like all the pretty ladies all round, and Dan laughed his great big laugh and said I'd have to join the Frivolity chorus.

But Brendan looked angry, and said shortly to Sophie, 'What are you going to do with her?' Then he looked at me, and his anger vanished, and his eyes were full of affectionate teasing. 'You can't keep her round Drovny Street. She's much too pretty.'

Sophie had her 'shut-up look', so I could not guess what she was thinking.

'And what would you do with her, Brendan boy?' she challenged. 'At least at Drovny Street I can keep my eye on her.'

The teasing vanished, the handsome eyes were suddenly quite serious. 'Why don't you send her to a boarding-school?' he said.

I couldn't believe it! Brendan—my friend, my new, adopted, adored brother and companion. It was treachery. I knew my eyes were blazing, but he put an arm round my shoulders, so that my temper vanished and my cheeks flushed. 'You lay your ears back like a blood-mare when you're cross, Rose,' he said. 'Wouldn't you like to go to school and learn to be a lady?'

'I want to stay at Drovny Street and be just like Sophie,' I said furiously, and he looked up at her with a query in his eyes, and she glanced away. She looked wonderful in a dress of pale fawn cloth, and a hat trimmed with little puffs of apricot and flamy red feathers. She looked slowly and speculatively from Brendan to me, and from me to Brendan. On the table, by her

hand with its new wedding-ring, lay the cluster of Marechal Neill roses that Dan had bought her for the wedding.

She said slowly, 'I think it's a good notion of yours to send her off to school, Brendan.'

She and Dan drove off afterwards in Dan's hired growler to Victoria Station, where they were going to take a train to Brighton to spend two or three days. I thought then how much older than Sophie Dan looked. He must have been fifteen years her senior. I remember thinking that anyone so beautiful should have been going away with someone as young and handsome as Brendan. She kissed me goodbye, told me to be a little good 'un, and to do as Aunt Min said, and to stay upstairs in the evenings. I was glad enough to do this, because the house was in charge of Dan's manager while he was away, a tall, sallow, saturnine Italian who scared the life out of me when he caught me watching the well-dressed men and women coming in to play their luck.

While they were away Brendan came and fetched all his things. He was working at Epsom for a Mr. Vestry who apparently trained racehorses, and he had a room there. It was a long while before I saw him again, because as soon as Sophie came back I went to school.

When Sophie came back she had a room of her own, which Dan furnished for her, and it seemed to me like the palaces we had dreamed about in bed together in the dark in Hackney. It was all rosy wallpaper and carpets, and gilt and white furniture, and mirrors.

She seemed to have changed while she was away. There was something tight about her mouth, a sort of gathering herself together whenever Dan touched her. It was as if she was making herself endure it—as if really she wanted to flinch away from him but would not let herself. I remembered what she had said about paying her dues. It was the beginning of the tension that grew between them over the years, changing Dan terribly, and the beginning of the antagonism between Sophie and Brendan.

The day after they returned from Brighton she ordered the growler and she and I drove out to Blackheath. On the way, she listened in silence to my protests and tears, as I implored her to let me stay with her and go to the French school round the corner near Soho Square. Then she said quietly:

'Listen to me, our Rose. You're going to have a different sort of life from me. Our mother was a lady, and you're going to be the same. This is a world made for men, my girl, and don't you forget that. The sort of life a woman gets depends on the sort of man she gets, and I want you to be able to choose the best. You're as pretty as me, but I want you to be well-spoken, well-mannered and clever, as well. You're only a kid now, but in four or five years' time you'll be making your choice—and you want to be *able* to choose, not have to take the first fellow that can make you a genuine offer.'

We drew up outside a big house near the Paragon, with a round front lawn with a monkey-puzzle tree and a board which said that it was the Misses Mandeville's Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies. We were shown in through a large scrubbed hall. A troop of girls of various ages, in dark-blue dresses, came clattering through. One of them, a white-faced girl with red curls and freckles, put her tongue out at me.

We were shown into the parlour, where the Misses Mandeville (whom we always privately called 'The Sister Act') received us. One was iron-grey, massive and masculine, and the other was limp-haired, limp-voiced and cloyingly feminine. They looked at my sister's blooming youth, her clothes and her rings, and heard her flat Cockney vowels, somewhat doubtfully; but she brought out a handful of clean, crisp bank-notes, and the offer of a term's fees in advance appeared to clinch the matter. It was arranged for me to stay there and then, and for my box to be sent out to Blackheath later in the day.

With tears running down my face I watched Sophie drive off. I thought of Soho with its pubs and shops and restaurants, and of Hyde Park with Brendan and the horses, and I felt more lonely than I had ever felt in my life.

CHAPTER TWO

I WAS with the Misses Mandeville for four years, and during the whole of that time I never went to Drovny Street. For the holidays Sophie took a pretty little cottage in a lane near Epsom Downs, and I used to stay there with Aunt Min to look after me, and sometimes Marjorie Morrison would come and stay with me, and sometimes I would go to stay with her and her aunt in the big new block of flats in Bloomsbury. Marjorie was the red-headed girl who had put her tongue out at me. The flat was full of earnest, badly dressed, highly educated women, who never appeared to me to stop talking and were always advocating something they called Women's Rights and organising meetings and petitions for it.

Marjorie was a very comical girl. The first time we ever talked, which was at supper on my first night at school, when I was home-sick for Sophie and Aunt Min, for Brendan and even for the sound of Dan's big laugh and weather-beaten face, she looked at me over the bread and cheese and milk, and said, 'What's wrong with *you*? *I'm* illegitimate!'

I stared resentfully, and she insisted, 'There's something wrong with all of us here, or else for the fees we pay we'd be at one of those really smart schools for young ladies.'

I thought it over, and then asked if my sister being a music hall singer before she married would give me the correct degree of wrongness, and Marjorie's freckled face lit up with delight, and she said it certainly would. Sophie was a heroine to her from that moment, firstly because of the glamour of actually being on the stage (I didn't disillusion her as to the length and success of my sister's brief theatrical career) but also because of the fact that she had actually earned her living.

'How could she give up that glorious freedom to owe her livelihood to a *man*?' she would ask. She had a way of sayin

the word '*man*' as though the whole of the masculine population of England were combined in one symbolic Demon King engaged in the snaring and defeat of womankind. She was the daughter of a famous Q.C. and but for his sister would have been abandoned in an orphanage. But this formidable spinster lady had snatched her into her care and brought her up as her own daughter. They loved each other very much, and were very happy in their eccentric environment, and always referred to Marjorie's father as '*The Monster* who abandoned his own Flesh and Blood!' Later when I met him I found he was merely a rigidly conventional man, terrified that his one error should be discovered, and equally terrified of his sister Flora.

It seemed to me that Marjorie's Aunt Flora had very similar ideas to my sister Sophie, but their tactics were different. When I said that Sophie had married Dan because she wanted to better herself and that seemed the only way for a girl of her position to do so, you could practically see the sparks of scorn flash from Marjorie's green eyes. When women had the vote a woman would not have to stoop to such degradation, she said. I had to agree that she was right about a lot of things, though I was a romantic at heart and dreamed of love; but when Sophie descended on us, driving in her own little carriage now, all taffetas and furs and jewels and feathers and laces, bringing us pretty gifts, taking us out into the country for lunch, even Marjorie was enslaved by her. Driving home in the warm, scented carriage, tucked under the warm rugs, she would tell us of the theatres she had been to, snippets of society and theatre scandal, about Drovny Street, and Aunt Min.

Once or twice I asked about Brendan, and she said indifferently, 'I hardly ever see him. He's very busy with the horses.'

Once she looked at me shrewdly, her blue eyes smiling ironically, and said, 'You like him, don't you, our Rosie?' and when I flushed, and said I did, she put out a little hand gloved in pale lavender kid and touched my fair hair, not so curly as hers, but finer and longer, touched my cheek, and said, 'We'll find better game for you, my darling.' I did not understand what she meant.

Listening to Marjorie's speeches on Women's Rights (in vivid imitation of her Aunt Flora) Sophie would loll back in her furs, her golden head, always topped with an exquisite hat, nodding gently to the rhythm of the carriage, smiling, softly and mockingly, and say, 'Pigs'll fly when that time comes, Margie. I want my cut now, like the boys do. I'm not waiting for any man to treat me fair—I'd be old and grey before that happened.'

During all this time I rarely saw Dan, and then only when we were at the cottage at Epsom, for Sophie never brought him to the school. He had horses training at Epsom with Mr. Vestry, and sometimes he drove over from the stables with Sophie to see us, bringing us sweetmeats and fruit, and expensive things to eat. Even at Christmas, I didn't go to Drovny Street. They would stay at some expensive hotel, and Aunt Min and I would join them for a meal.

I never enjoyed these hotel visits very much. I suppose like most growing girls I was self-conscious and sensitive, and I could not help noticing that the rich family parties who stayed at these hotels looked down on Dan's loud and uproarious manner.

But that was not all of it. There was a strain between him and Sophie, a difference in his manner to her. It was a slowly growing thing, like a banked-down fire, a watchful suspicion, an ever-present jealousy that would flame out unexpectedly in bitter scenes and was fanned by her indifference. There was something frightening about the way he looked at her. He had an irritability and tendency to drink more than he used to. Aunt Min knew, and grumbled about it to me, but I was occupied with school and growing up and my own dreams, and listened with half an ear, and in any case I felt about Sophie then as Marjorie did about her Aunt Flora. For me she could not do any wrong.

'Men all has their vanity, like women,' Aunt Min would say crossly. 'Except, of course, it's different, like. A man's got to feel himself better'n his woman. It doesn't matter if 'e ain't, Rosie, so long as she makes 'im think he is. Now your dear

mother could never forget she was a lady born, and in a hundred little ways she let your dad know she looked down on 'im, so she was always pushing him down, like, until 'e ended up no more'n a beast. Yet, he was a fine, upstanding man when 'e was young.' She would add darkly, 'That Sophie plays with fire. She'll end up with getting burned, you mark my words. A man can stand so much and no more, and Dan's no fool. If all women went on like her because they'd been made a fool of as a girl, I tells her, it'd be a pretty sort of world. But she won't listen.'

'What do you mean? Who made a fool of her?'

But Aunt Min knew she had said too much, and said, 'Never you mind, Miss Big Ears!' as if I had no right to listen when she was talking aloud to herself.

The Misses Mandeville, although they personally were only equipped to teach us to be ladylike, charged high fees and employed good teachers, so we learned a lot at school—Marjorie, because she was cleverer, more than I. A lot of things happened that barely touched us out at Blackheath. There was some sort of rebellion in China and the old Queen died, and Marjorie's aunt took us both to Piccadilly to see the funeral pass with all the drums and soldiers, and the kings following, and we were a bit disappointed because the kings all looked just like other men, and then the new King was ill, and then he got better, and Sophie fetched us to Piccadilly to see the King's Coronation, with the new Queen looking like a lovely little painted doll under her diamond crown. Afterwards Sophie took us to lunch at a big hotel, and she wore a hat covered with blue forget-me-nots, and men kept coming up and kissing her hand. That and the theatre trips were about the only exciting things that happened during those four years.

It was the end of the Easter term and I was eighteen, and Marjorie was going to leave that year and start at a crammer's so she could get into a women's college at Cambridge. I was beginning to wonder what was going to happen to me, trying to assess myself, remembering the time when Sophie had taken me to school and told me that in four or five years I'd be able

to make my own choice. Choice of what? What was I equipped for?

Well, four years had passed, and in my assessment I could give myself fair for most things, learning, music, singing, French. Fair, I thought, but next to Marjorie I would show up as a ninny. As far as sophistication went I was an odd mixture, the smooth layer of the past four years at school covering the memories of my youth at Hackney and the brief glimpse of that house in Drovny Street.

I had one great asset, and I knew it, and I can't see why women should pretend they don't know it. I was more than pretty. I wasn't particularly proud about it. It is one of those things, surely, like being born black or white, which you can't help. But it's useful, and even at school I began to understand what Sophie meant about a woman's weapons, because as I grew to womanhood I awoke devotion in other people without any effort on my part and sometimes without even wanting it. The cloying, clinging, young Miss Mandeville for instance. I knew that it was because I was pretty, and realised the power it gave me.

I was the same colouring as Sophie, but my hair was waist-length and straighter, and although I was taller I didn't look so tough. About Sophie's lithe little figure there was a resilience and strength, just as there was about the alert turn of her head on the long slender neck which we both inherited from our mother.

I went down to the cottage as usual for the Easter holidays and Marjorie came with me because her Aunt Flora was away in the provinces campaigning for Women's Rights. She brought a valise full of books to study for her entrance examination for college, which made me feel quite limp just to look at them. She wore her red hair up in a bun now, and spectacles. Instead of wearing pince-nez with a little gold chain fastened to her lapel like most ladies, she just put on an enormous pair of tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses, like a philosopher in an old print, which made her look like a baby owl. It was strange what good friends we were, because we really

had very little in common—except laughter, and I suppose that is one of the first ingredients for a good friendship.

I was feeling pretty sick and sorry for myself at the thought of the summer term. I had learned all I could with the Misses Mandeville, and quite suddenly I did not feel a schoolgirl any more. I spent my time pestering Sophie with letters imploring her to let me leave school. I was quite willing, I said naïvely, to help them at Drovny Street, not realising, of course, that this was one of the reasons that she had kept me away. She wanted something a lot grander than that for me.

The woods round the Downs were full of bluebells and birdsong. We went long walks or rode our bicycles—decorous, in our divided skirts, though the sight of these sent the village boys whooping. We read and talked, and ate enormous meals cooked by Aunt Min, and longed for Sophie to come and see us.

One day towards the end of April we got up before dawn because Marjorie had a romantic notion of seeing the dawn come up over the Downs. We wrapped ourselves in our coats, and put woollen scarves over our heads like village girls, and went out.

It was very strange and eerie, the sky so large and enormous, the stars paling, the grandstand black against yellowing sky, and London far away, the lights going out, and then the birds bursting into song. From the woods came the first cuckoo calls, and from the distant farms the crowing of cocks. Everywhere across the short downland grass the scuts of rabbits showed white, bolting away from us as we walked. Somehow we were drunk with the air, and the smell of spring in the early morning, and being young and apparently the sole inhabitants of the dawning world. We started to race and shout and catch each other, and my scarf came off and my hair danced in the wind like a yellow banner.

Suddenly we heard the sound of hooves drumming along the turf, louder and nearer, and we couldn't see from where. Then they were nearly on top of us, and we both yelled and threw ourselves into the grass. A string of thoroughbreds went by,

necks stretched, boys hunched up on their necks like monkeys, the sound of hooves filling the air as they swept by and away down the hill.

As we sat there gasping, staring, scared, another horseman came cantering towards us. He swung himself down and came across to where we lay, breathless, in the grass.

'Are you hurt?' he called.

We looked at each other, and the early morning craziness was still with us, for we shook our heads and laughed out loud.

'What the devil do you think you're up to,' he went on furiously, 'prancing around on the downs at this hour of the morning! You might have had the whole string down!'

Marjorie leapt to her feet, and said, icily, 'Do you own the Downs?'

But I called out, beside myself with joy, 'Brendan! Brendan!'

He turned and looked at me as I sat up on the grass with my hair spilling all about, and I jumped to my feet and ran towards him, crying eagerly, 'Brendan! It's me! It's Rose Eve –Sophie's sister. Don't you recognise me?'

Recognition dawned in his face. He was older, leaner, harder, with not quite so much laughter about him, but he was handsomer than ever, and all the mooning girl-dreams of four years ago burst into awareness of him.

He pulled off his cap and came over to me, and the hard face relaxed, and he smiled, and said, 'Little Rose! I thought you were a couple of gipsy girls. What on earth are you doing here at this hour?'

'I live here in the holidays. This is my friend Marjorie Morrison.' He bowed gravely. 'Where have you come from?'

'I work over at Mr. Vestry's training-stable. I have a room there now.'

'And do you mean to say,' I said furiously, 'that you've been so near, and I've been here every holiday since I started school at Blackheath, and you've never once been over to see me?'

He smiled at my anger. 'I'm sorry—but I didn't know you

were here.'

'But didn't Sophie or Dan tell you?'

'I don't go to Drovny Street now, I only see them occasionally. Dan has a couple of horses with Vestry, and I see him when he comes out to have a look at them.'

'Don't you see Sophie?'

He looked at me and said shortly, 'Oh, yes, I *see* her—at the races and round about.' I knew then there was something between them—anger, perhaps, or dislike—and I hated the thought, because they were my two special people. Some of my distress must have shown on my face, for he said gently, 'Dan's married now, so of course everything is different.'

The sun was up now, flooding the heathland with sunshine, and the larks were beginning to rise in the morning warmth. He stood looking at me. I became conscious of my hair streaming about my shoulders, and I gathered it up and began to plait it. Over the hill the string came trotting back to us, the boys standing up in the stirrups to ease their mounts.

'Who do they belong to?' I asked.

'Two are Dan's. The others belong to Lord Woodbourne.' Again I heard an inflection in his voice which I did not understand, a slight harshness when he spoke Lord Woodbourne's name.

He had his bay hack by the bridle now, and I was fondling it and feeding it with the Bath Oliver biscuits we had brought in our pockets. The string went past like a frieze against the sky, the boys raising their whips in greeting. He swung up into the saddle to follow them, and I stood at his horse's head, my cheek against it, looking up at him.

'Do you remember when you taught me to ride, Brendan? I've never ridden since.'

'No. That's a pity—you had a good seat and a nice light hand.'

I burst out, thoughtlessly, as though I were still fourteen, 'Can't we come and see the stable? Can't you find us some horses?'

'Not me,' said Marjorie keeping her distance. 'To me they're unpredictable animals. Besides, I have to work.'

'Me then?' I said pleadingly. 'What's the matter, Brendan? Don't you like me any more? Don't forget you are my brother-in-law.'

He said grimly, 'I'm not like to forget that. Come on, Bunting, let go.' I let go the horse, and he trotted forward a pace or so. Then, as though the old teasing name had changed his mind, he wheeled back again, and said, 'Of course you can come and see the horses.'

I was filled with delight. 'Tomorrow?' I asked.

'No. Sunday. The day after tomorrow. I'll call for you. And Rose, if you're going to ride you'd better get some clothes to ride in. You're grown-up now, you know.'

He was laughing into my eyes as he used to, but there was something new and exciting in the way he looked at me. I remembered myself at fourteen in blue serge and a sailor hat, showing lengths of long black stocking, and probably frilled knickers as well, as I climbed into the saddle. I thought furiously I'd show him I wasn't a baby any more.

He touched his cap with his whip and cantered after the vanishing thoroughbreds, and Marjorie and I turned to walk back to the cottage for breakfast.

'What do you think of my brother-in-law?' I asked.

'Handsome,' she said, then shrewdly: 'He was a bit strange about your sister. Don't they get on?'

'I think so. I don't know.'

'Perhaps he likes her too much.'

She echoed my thoughts. I felt all the mixed-up doubt and irritation one feels when people who matter have a secret you don't know.

'Perhaps they've quarrelled,' I said vaguely. I knew that he had not really wanted her to marry Dan, and that no man really disliked Sophie—and Brendan was not a man who was indifferent to women, nor were women indifferent to him. I myself was all aglow at the unexpected encounter and the thought of seeing him again.

The next day Aunt Min and I went to an outfitter's to get me some riding clothes. Sophie always gave me a very good dress allowance, which of course I did not really need either at school or at the cottage, and she did not mind how I spent it, so long as what I bought was in good taste. Her own taste, if a little theatrical, was superlative. She always dressed as though she was about to walk into the limelight; which in a way she was, because wherever she went people noticed her, for her beauty and vivacity. Well, anyway, I got a grey habit with a black velvet collar, and a little hard black hat, and some boots.

On Sunday, Brendan came about three, riding his hack and leading a quiet grey. I came out with my long hair up in a coil, and my hard hat set firmly on it, pulling on my gloves, and feeling very dashing; but when I looked up at him I saw in his eyes not the admiration I was hoping for, but a sort of tender amusement which I was not so sure about. I did not want to remember the little girl he had taught to ride. I was forgetting her, and I wanted him to forget her too.

He took my foot decorously and lifted me up into the saddle. I was a little nervous at first, it was so long since I had been on a horse, but the grey was milky mild and we trotted off over the Downs.

It was a lovely spring day, and the gipsies were coming in for the races which would be in a month's time. As we rode by the grandstand, Brendan pointed with his whip over the Downs. 'As far as you can see it will be all people,' he said. 'People and horses, and carriages and tents.'

'Will you be there?'

'Yes. Lord Woodbourne has a horse running in the big race. I shall have to be there.'

'Will you take me, Brendan? Will you take me?'

'Won't you be back at school?'

'I've written to Sophie to tell her I'm not going back. I'm eighteen. I'm too old for school.'

His brows met in a straight line across his nose, and his mouth was suddenly harsh. 'And what does she propose to do with you?'

'I don't know,' I said disconsolately. 'I don't mind telling you, Brendan, that I've felt just like a brown-paper parcel for the last few years, just being sent here and there wherever Sophie decides to send me.' He laughed then, and I went on, 'She always said I should be able to choose a rich husband.'

'And will you like that?'

'I never thought about it all until today. I wouldn't care about anything if I could only get out of school.'

He turned and looked at me, and he was not angry, and he was not laughing, and he said, 'That would be a pretty drastic alternative, Rose. Have you ever thought what living with a man would be—especially if you didn't love him?'

I went scarlet, and said hotly, 'Well, of course, I *should* love him!'

I knew what he meant, theoretically. Girls in schools always talk about love, and often about sex, even if they don't admit it, but I dare say most of our talk was ignorant rubbish. Funny how older women seemed to conspire to keep that sort of knowledge secret, as though it was too horrible to contemplate. I think they often spoil love for girls. But until that precise moment I had never thought of marriage as an actual physical mating. It was a hazy dream of wedding bells and white satin, and unlimited riches; the man in it was faceless, disembodied. Except in the real dreams, at night, and then sometimes it had been, uncompromisingly, Brendan; but as Marjorie said, that was because he was the only young man I had ever known.

Girls grow up in fits and starts. In that moment when Brendan said gravely, 'You can't fall in love to order, you know, Rose,' I seemed to grow up a whole year. I remembered Sophie's face after the young musician had gone out of her life, and again when she had come back from her honeymoon with Dan, and I knew exactly what he meant.

We had got to the place where the birch woods dip down the valley behind Headley, and we dismounted and led our horses, because there were a lot of tree stumps concealed in the grass. The woods were full of bluebells—sheets of them, like a reflected blue sky.

We sat down on a log, Brendan looking across the valley, and me looking at him, at the strong line of his face, and the thick curling hair, and the strength and fineness of his hands. The horses, tethered, stood quietly, pricking their ears at the woodland noises, nibbling at a clump of grass.

He looked round and caught my glance. As I looked away, he said:

'You know, you're very beautiful, Rose.'

My heart bounded with delight, but I managed to answer sensibly.

'But I can't *do* anything much. I'm not clever like Marjorie Morrison. Sophie has educated me to be a young lady, but I'm not really that. Is it any use being an imitation lady? Being pretty is not enough. I'm rather silly, I think, Brendan.'

'Not silly. Just very young, and very sweet.' He said, 'How would you like to go right away to a new country like Australia, where everything is different, and where all this lady-and-gentleman business doesn't count, and where a man is proud to work and call himself a working man?'

'I don't know. I've never thought of it.'

'I've often thought of it.'

I said, in a panic, 'Brendan! Please don't go away!' He smiled, and I realised how unreasonable it sounded. Why should he stay in England for me? 'Well, promise me you won't go without telling me first?'

His smile deepened, sweet and warm. 'I can promise you that, anyway, Rose. I won't sneak off without telling you.' He rose and held out his hand to pull me to my feet. 'Come along. We'll go back to the stables and I'll show you the horses. I told Mrs. Vestry I'd bring you in for some tea.'

We went back to the stables at a good fast canter, the wind in our faces. By the time we got there I was glad to get down, for both my hands and my seat were sore, and when he lifted me down he laughed at my stiffness. We went into a big farmhouse type of house, and he introduced me to Dick Vestry and his wife, who were nice country people of a type I had never met. He was short, with the taut, braced figure of a horseman,

like Brendan, and a leathery brown face; and she was a big woman, all pink and blowy like a full-blown rose. When she shook hands she said, 'Well, I never—Mrs. Dan's sister, eh? I'd never have known it.'

'We're supposed to be very alike,' I said. 'Tell me, have you seen Mrs. Dan lately? She hasn't been down, not once since I've been at the cottage this holiday.'

'Well, I reckon she's got plenty on her plate.' Mrs. Vestry glanced uneasily at the two men, and again I sensed a mystery. 'But she comes down here fairly often.'

'To see Dan's horses?'

Again the glance, and she said, 'Aye, Dan's and the others'.'

We had a big, beautiful farmhouse tea, and I was hungry and ate like the schoolgirl I was. Afterwards Brendan took me round the stables, and I saw the thoroughbreds all so strong and slender, all so different, some gentle and sweet, some tricky, flattening their ears and stamping wickedly, showing the white of their eyes. It was after five o'clock, and the lads were clanking about with pails, getting ready to bed the horses down.

'It's like school,' I said dismally. 'Now I know why a horse wants to bolt. Thank you for a wonderful, wonderful day Brendan. I've been so utterly happy. Will you take me riding again?' I threw my arms round him. I had taken off my hard hat, and my beastly hair had come slithering down my shoulders.

He looked down at me and said, 'Of course, while you're here, if you would like it, Bunting.' The sound of the old name made me feel warm and happy and belonging.

There was a sound of voices behind us. Brendan's head went up sharply, and I saw his face change. I turned round, and found Sophie standing at the end of the yard with Mr. Vestry and a well-dressed, middle-aged man with a smiling, long, well-bred, sensual face, and a boy a little older than me, also very, very smart and elegant, with a fair face, and a girlish, unformed mouth.

They came forward smiling. At least the men were smiling,

but Sophie was looking through her veil at Brendan and me with that sharp way of hers, making me feel unaccountably guilty, as though I had committed some misdemeanour. She was beautifully dressed in pale grey, with pale grey furs into which a huge cluster of Parma violets was pinned.

'Well now, Brady,' said the older man, and I saw Brendan's eyes glint at his patronising familiarity, 'we've caught you out properly. Who's your pretty friend?'

But before Brendan could reply, Sophie said, 'It's my little sister Rose, Woody. What on earth are you doing here, our Rosie?'

'Brendan came for me,' I said. 'And he's been giving me a riding lesson. I haven't ridden for four years. I don't see why I shouldn't have ridden every time I've been down at the cottage. D'you like my habit? Aunt Min and I bought it in Epsom yesterday.'

I turned round to show off, and when I faced her again, trying, as I turned, to twist up my long yellow hair, I saw the two men were both watching me with a sort of indulgence which was not all admiration and which brought the colour to my cheeks.

Sophie said with soft mockery, 'I'll reckon Konsky of Savile Row will fit you out better than that, eh, Woody?' And they all laughed together.

Brendan said stiffly, 'I'm just going to get the gig out, Rose, and then I'll take you home.'

Lord Woodbourne drawled, 'You needn't bother, Brady. I expect you've got a lot to do with the horses—we'll be glad to take little Miss Eves home.'

'Yes, indeed, Miss Eves,' the young man chimed in. 'Uncle George has got his new pair in the landau this afternoon. They're absolute whizzers.'

I did not know what to do. The experience of driving in Lord Woodbourne's carriage would not compensate me for having to ride home with this girl-faced boy instead of with Brendan. I looked helplessly at Sophie for guidance, but she was watching Brendan as though he might give her a sign. But

his face was impassive as he met her eyes.

She said in that strange voice of hers, harsh, fascinating and vivacious, 'She'll be quite safe with her big sister, Brendan boy.'

He looked at her with a look so strange and fierce I was bewildered, and he gave me a curt little nod of his head, and walked away. As he passed Sophie she put her hand out suddenly and caught his arm. He stopped, and they looked at each other, his eyes still fierce, full of some inner burning which I could not understand, hers filled with that mocking, beguiling look which she used to all men, a look which held a half-promise, a half-dare. His mouth tightened angrily, and he pulled his arm away and went on towards the house. For a fleeting second she was disconcerted, then in a second she was her old, laughing, fascinating self, her little hand in its white glove resting on Lord Woodbourne's arm as she smiled up at him.

We trailed round the yard looking at Lord Woodbourne's thoroughbreds. Mr. Vestry had them led out by the lads, and I stood by with the young man, who was apparently called Hugh Travers and was Lord Woodbourne's nephew. I don't know whether he was shy or whether he could not think of anything to say, but he certainly did not say anything. He just looked at me with his big, handsome, blank blue eyes until we started to walk away from the yard, when, Sophie, Lord Woodbourne and Mr. Vestry being out of hearing and absorbed in extremely knowledgeable talk about thoroughbreds, jockeys and betting, he suddenly exploded into words.

'My word, Miss Eves, I must say I do think you are an absolutely topping girl. I do think you must be one of the prettiest girls I've ever met!'

I stared at him astounded with what Marjorie always calls my 'fly-in-the-jam' look. I couldn't help it. I thought he was utterly stupid. My experience of men was nil anyway, and it had never occurred to me that a young man through shyness could be just as silly as a giggling girl. I raised my brows, and said, '*Really!*' and turned away.

Hugh Travers coloured up like one of the Misses Mandeville's young ladies, and for the first time in my life I knew that power which an attractive woman had over men, the power which Sophie so skilfully and implacably used; and the sensation was both frightening and exciting. I saw his gentle, girlish mouth quiver, and I was cross with myself for being so mean. I smiled at him conciliatingly, but was not prepared for the eagerness that came leaping into his eyes.

Suddenly all the things that Sophie had drummed into my head over the years became reality—that a woman's life depended on the man she chooses, that beauty was a weapon, and that youth was a power to be used while you had it; and I was afraid and bewildered, because this was not what I wanted. It was bargaining, and I remembered what Brendan had said this afternoon, and Marjorie with her ranting about women's emancipation, which I had thought so boring, and I knew I did not want to bargain with myself.

Sophie, Lord Woodbourne and Mr. Vestry had gone ahead through the passage that led between the stable blocks into the wide gravelled drive that led up to the front of the house. In front of the house stood a highly polished carriage with two fine bays, the uniformed coachman holding their heads. As we approached he called a boy to hold them and began to take out the rugs and lower the step.

Just at that moment another carriage came into the yard, and I heard Sophie's breath catch as I recognised Dan's hired growler, with his familiar red-faced, Cockney driver handling the reins.

At the sound of the wheels on the gravel, Brendan came out of the house. He stopped on the steps, and for a moment everyone seemed suspended, looking at the door of the growler.

Dan climbed clumsily out, and from the way he did so I knew he had been drinking. Aunt Min had told me that he was drinking too much. 'Some men do,' she had said, 'when life gets out of hand for them—your father did.'

Dan looked round, genially enough, his big ruined face

smiling. Then he saw Sophie and Lord Woodbourne, and the smile went from his mouth and eyes like an extinguished light.

Sophie tilted her head under the big hat of pale grey tulle and went smiling towards him. Sullenly he watched her approach, and I saw Brendan watching too. Of all of them, only he looked really anxious as she went up to Dan, and I knew he was afraid of what Dan might do.

She said, smiling, eyes and pretty little teeth sparkling, 'Why, Dan! If I'd known you were coming out to Vestry's I would have asked you to drive me. Lord Woodbourne has brought me out to see his horses, and look who's here—young Rose. She's been riding with Brendan.'

He looked at her harshly, his face heavy and unhappy. Then she clasped her hands over his arm in the coaxing, pretty way she had, and I saw his anger melt, and I turned away, because of the little gleam of hope that rose in his beaten eyes which somehow I couldn't bear to watch. Dan had always been so kind and generous to me. I did not know what Sophie was doing, nor why, but I hated it and wished she would not.

Woodbourne came forward, hand extended, very much the rich gentleman patronising the gaming-house-keeper.

'Why, Brady,' he said, 'I didn't know you were coming out to see your two nags. I've just seen them, and they looked in pretty good shape. You ought to do some good with them.'

Dan looked at him and said with a stolid sort of dignity, 'That's as may be. But I'll thank you, my lord, to keep away from my wife.'

I saw the anger in Woodbourne's eyes, and Dan's hand tightened possessively on Sophie's arm as he led her to his carriage.

All the cajolery had gone from her face. It was set and hard, as it had been that night when she had left home and taken me with her: the look she had when she had made up her mind about something and nothing was going to stop her. She looked once towards Woodbourne as she got into Dan's carriage, a swift compelling look as if she was giving him an

answer to an unspoken question, and then banged the door behind them and they drove away.

Woodbourne strode across to his carriage and pair without a glance in my direction, but Hugh Travers stopped, blushed, and said, 'I do hope I'll see you again, Miss Eves. I have to go with my uncle now,' then they too drove off with a clatter of wheels and hooves, the two fine bays a picture in the evening light.

Brendan looked at me. It was the first time he had moved since Dan had arrived.

'It looks as though I'll have to take you home after all, Rose,' he said. And I was glad, I had wanted so much to go with him.

I helped him to get out the gig and to harness a grey pony, and said goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Vestry, and soon we were trotting home through the lanes. The swallows were flying low, and over the hawthorn hedges and nettles the midges were dancing. It would be fine tomorrow.

'Will you take me riding tomorrow, Brendan?' I said eagerly.

He glanced up, as though from a reverie. He met my glance, and said, 'Yes, if you want. I'll bring the horses over to the cottage. About three.'

We stopped outside the cottage and he jumped out and lifted me down. He held me with my feet just above the ground. Although I am tall for a girl, he was very tall. But held like this my face was just level with his. His lips were very near and I felt my heart quicken and pound, and that strange sensation of excitement, as though a bird, perched on the top of your stomach, suddenly flaps and flutters, beating to get out. But he made no attempt to kiss me.

'You're so like her,' he said slowly.

'Sophie?' I said.

He set me down. 'Yes. The hair, the lovely skin ... but you're taller, and your eyes are still a girl's eyes.'

'But,' I protested, 'Sophie's not much more than a girl herself.' He laughed, and I said unhappily, 'What's the matter

with everyone? Don't you like her any more?'

'She's a devil,' he said. 'Pretty and sweet and soft as a doll. The devil's doll.'

But it did not answer my question. I did not know whether he did not like her, or—and my heart faltered at the thought of this—whether he liked her too much.

We were to return to school the following Sunday, which would be the beginning of the second week in May, and I would stay there (Sophie said in a letter) perhaps for a week, perhaps for three, it depended upon her 'arrangements'. I had no idea what these arrangements might be, and Marjorie tried to pump Aunt Min—without any success, for she was as tight as a clam about Sophie. 'She'll have her reason,' she would say, or, 'Young Sophie knows what she's a-doing.'

This was all very well, but it was my future, and I wanted to know. Lying on my bed in the cottage bedroom with its sloping ceiling and the dormer blue with night sky between the dimity curtains, Marjorie and I would talk about our future as we often had at school. I didn't dream so much about Brendan, because he was there, calling for me each day to take me riding. Marjorie, who did not like horses, and was longing to ride in one of the new-fangled motor-cars, was very decent about being left with Aunt Min for an hour or so each afternoon when I went riding, and it did give her a chance to study for her entrance examinations to the college at Cambridge.

At the end of the week I had another letter from Sophie saying she was making some changes which she would let me know about later. She would come and fetch me from school one day, to do some shopping. It was time I had some new clothes. Meanwhile I was to work hard in the few weeks that were left to me at school, particularly at my singing and dancing, because she had spoken about me to Mr. George Deward.

I was furious about having to go back to school at all, but it wasn't so bad if it was only going to be for a short while. I showed Marjorie Sophie's letter, and we stared at each other in excitement. We both knew who Mr. George Deward was.

He was the lessee of the Frivolity Theatre. *Sophie was planning to put me on the stage!*

'I can't act!' I said horrified.

'Frivolity girls don't need to,' said Marjorie. 'They have to look beautiful and ladylike, dress beautifully, sing a bit and dress the stage. They nearly all marry or become the mistresses of millionaires and earls.'

I thought of my fourteenth birthday, driving with Sophie with my face all bruised, past the Frivolity, with the lights and carriages outside, on our way to throw ourselves on Dan's generosity. I understood that the time of choosing had arrived.

CHAPTER THREE

I SUPPOSE it was one of the happiest weeks of my life, that one at the cottage with Marjorie, seeing Brendan every day. It had all the excitement of being nearly grown-up, and some of the excitement of first love, and the two of us were free out there on the Downs. Life had not claimed us yet, nor had youth deserted us. We were in a balance—waiting our fates, so to speak, but too innocent and gay to even suspect that the future could hold anything but joy.

Every afternoon Brendan called for me. Sometimes we rode back to Mr. Vestry's training-stable and I watched or helped while he worked, and afterwards we had tea in the farmhouse kitchen with Mr. and Mrs. Vestry. They were very fond of Brendan, but I think Mr. Vestry, so long as the morning work was done, was stretching a point during the afternoons, for quite often we had time to take a flask of hot tea and some sandwiches and ride out to the woods.

The odd scene between Sophie and Brendan, with its suggestion of suppressed violence, faded from my mind, and I

think it did from his too, because we were so happy together, as we used to be, getting to know each other again. We were not a young man and a schoolgirl any more, but a young man and a girl very near his own age. Our two generations had fused. What it meant to him I did not know, but for me at any rate, there was the wonderful tension that comes before falling in love.

On the Saturday morning before Marjorie and I went back to school I had Sophie's letter telling me about the interview she had fixed with Mr. Deward of the Frivolity, and I told Brendan about it in the afternoon as we were riding through the birch woods. I saw his face darken and his mouth set, as he said, 'So you're Sophie Eves' sister after all. I had nearly forgotten it.'

I hated the tone of his voice—it was an insult, even if his words were not really insulting.

'I don't know what you mean,' I said angrily. 'And what's wrong with Sophie? She's always been wonderful to me, and I don't see why you don't like her.'

'One doesn't like or dislike Sophie Eves,' he said. 'One either loves or hates her.'

'And which do you?'

He looked at me quickly. He had the sort of eyes, between his thick dark lashes, in which the iris has depth, and the daylight makes them the colour of aquamarines. Again I felt the excitement and the fear. I did not want him to say he hated my sister—but remembering Marjorie's words, I did not want him to say he loved her either.

'Never mind what I feel,' he said. 'Dan worships the ground she walks on. It's an obsession. He'd pull the stars out of the sky for her if he could, and she treats him like a dog.' I listened aghast. 'So she's starting you at the Frivolity? Well, she couldn't do better. You'll be a draw there. A nice new, fresh, pretty piece of flesh up for the highest bidder!'

I was furiously angry, because I did not really understand him in spite of what Marjorie had said about the Frivolity girls, and also because of his tone, edged with distaste. I cried

out like the silly schoolgirl I was, 'I think you're horrid, Brendan Brady!'

I dug my heel into my mount, forgetting it was not the stolid old grey Brendan had started me on last week, but a young horse he had promoted me to and which I was very proud to be trusted with. It bucked like a stag, and set off down the woodland path, stumbling over a tree stump at the bottom as it swung left to avoid the stream and sending me over its head like a cannon-ball.

I landed up against a birch tree—my hard hat took the brunt of the blow, jamming down over my eyes like a candle-snuffer. I had a moment of irritated humiliation at my predicament before I went out like a light, and woke I don't know how much later to find Brendan holding me up by the side of the brook, pushing my head forward, and bathing my face with his riding stock, which he had torn off and soaked in the cold spring water.

I gasped and shuddered. I saw the anxiety in his face and the relief when I opened my eyes. I was bruised and muddy and my damned hair, as usual, was all over the place. He suddenly held me tight against him, tightly, closely, his face against my hair.

'I'm all right,' I said shakily. 'At least I think I am.' But I didn't move, because it was like being in some unexpected, warm safe haven, to be there in his arms.

'Oh, Bunting,' he said against my hair, 'oh, my stupid Bunting, *never* do a thing like that again!'

He knelt back, still supporting me against his shoulder, then helped me up. My head was hurting, but I felt all right, a bit giddy and sick.

I said, trying to smile, 'It's like the first time we met—do you remember? I had a great bruise on my head then.'

He said gravely, 'Yes. I remember. I wanted to kick the man who did it—I want to kick myself now. Bunting, don't ever say things that make me lose my temper, so that I say things I don't mean. We've got black Irish tempers, we Bradys.'

He was not laughing. He was very grave—and I knew it was true, both of him and of Dan.

'I'll try not to,' I said. 'But when you say things I don't understand it makes me mad. I mean it makes me feel so stupidly young. Sophie does it too. Why can't people be honest instead of hinting, and making you feel an utter fool!'

He smiled then with that sweetness and tenderness that I remembered vividly from our first meeting, and helped me over to a fallen log, and sat beside me. His own solid hack stood quietly near, while my mount trotted nervously through the birch trees, gradually coming nearer, the whites of its eyes showing as though it was not quite sure whether to trust me again or not.

'Larcher isn't hurt?' I said anxiously.

'No, the silly brute,' he said. It was not one of the horses in training, but one Mr. Vestry had bought for himself.

He took my hand, holding it tightly between his own. 'Look, Rose,' he said, 'I know what it's like at the Frivolity. The girls there are the beauties of the town. It's true that they meet many wealthy men, that they're showered with presents, and I see why Sophie wants you to start there. You're very lovely—and she's a personal friend of Deward's so it should be easy. Deward's a good man. He looks after his girls—but the temptation, when you're pretty and not very wealthy, is very great.'

'But we don't seem to be poor—Sophie always has plenty of money.'

'Oh, yes,' he agreed quietly, 'Sophie always has everything she wants.'

I remembered then that everything we had came from Dan, and what Brendan had said about the way she treated him. The colour came up my face, and I said defiantly, 'I don't see what else I *could* do. I'm not clever, like Marjorie. What is there for my sort of girl to do in this world except get married, or slave in a shop from eight to eight for a few shillings a week? At least I'll be getting paid for something I like doing, won't I?'

'Yes,' he said still grave and unsmiling, 'you'll get paid.'

'Well, then?' I said.

He smiled, shaking his head. 'Sometimes you'll be offered presents that will have cost more than a month's money.'

'Who would give them to me?'

'Men like Hugh Travers.'

I burst out laughing, so that my bruised head throbbed. 'Hugh Travers? He's not a man, he's just an overgrown little boy.'

'Nevertheless,' said Brendan gravely, 'he's very rich—and Lord Woodbourne's heir.'

I stared. 'What's that got to do with it?'

His eyes cleared, and he smiled, and lifted my chin, and kissed me very gently.

'All right, my Bunting,' he said. 'Come on now. I must take you home.'

He caught Larcher, and changed the saddles, so that I rode home on his solid hack. On the way back I reminded him about Derby Day, and he smiled and said he would like to take me but he could not fetch me all the way from school as Lord Woodbourne had a horse running.

'If I could get out to Mr. Vestry's,' I insisted, 'would you take me then?'

'If you *could*. But how would you do that? It would have to be early. There's a lot to do. We'd want the horse over at the course before one. All the lads want to get out to see the big race, so it's always a rush.'

'I won't be any bother, I promise you,' I said anxiously. 'I won't get in the way of anything, if *only* you'll let me come. Please, please say I can come.'

'If you can get over here early and safely,' he said soberly, 'and if Sophie will allow you to come, I'll take you.'

Although he was trying to control it, his voice held the odd note of violent feeling that always crept into it at her name, or showed in his eyes when he looked at her, as though in some way he did not trust himself, and was angry with himself for feeling that way.

We were walking the horses down the lane to the cottage.

Over our heads the branches of the big beech trees met like a long, leaf-dappled, green-shaded cathedral nave.

'Don't you think she will?' I faltered.

'I don't think it's likely,' he said. He reined up at the cottage door, and waved to Marjorie, whose red head and owl glasses showed at the parlour window.

'Why not?'

He dismounted and came to lift me down, and when he spoke it was in a mocking, artificial stage Irish. 'Och, sure and would she be lettin' a pure young lady like yourself mix with a no-good penniless Oirish divil at all?'

'Brendan,' I said furiously, 'you're being horrid again!' But he only laughed and set me down. He swung himself up into his saddle and bent for a moment to ruffle my hair, then clattered off along the lane with the two horses.

My last weeks at school were quite different from any others I had ever spent there. For one thing Marjorie was no longer there and I missed her dreadfully. Also, the Misses Mandeville gave up any pretence that I was a scholar, and I did more or less as I pleased. So I helped them with the little ones because I always enjoyed doing this, though many of the things I liked doing with them were not strictly approved of, like racing games, hop-scotch and jumping and skipping and ball-games. The Misses Mandeville seemed to think these were all for common street children and not for young ladies. I, of course, remembered them all from my Hackney days. 'One, two, three, alairey, my ball's gone down the airey!' 'Allysloper did a dance, out of England into France, out of France into Spain, over the hills and back again, O-U-T spells out, and Out you go!' Higher and Higher. Salt—Mustard—Vinegar—Pepper. All the old jingles came back to me, and the poor pale juniors had their cheeks red for once and their skirts flying.

I thought then, that if I ever had children I would never send them to school to be taught to be ladies. I'd buy them ponies, and I'd live in a big wide place where they could run

free. Being a child needs only a wildness and a freedom, and I had never had it—or only briefly, riding with Brendan. I had always been cramped like these little girls, by my mother, and by Sophie always wanting me to be ladylike. Fretting as I was then, on the brink of womanhood, longing to get out into life, it seemed to me that the whole of England was obsessed by this business of being ladylike. If you weren't a lady born, then you must try to sound and look like one, and what use was it to you? I knew then what Brendan meant about going away to a big free country where these things didn't matter. I knew then why Sophie was so different—not belonging anywhere; feminine but not ladylike; a pirate sort of woman; yet worth more to me than all the wretched ladies, real or artificial, in the whole world.

I also hired a horse and rode on the Heath. It was all right, but it was nothing like riding over the Downs with Brendan. The horse was a poor riding-school hack, and the riding-master was fifty and inclined to try and flirt. If Marjorie had been at school we would have laughed together over it, but now I had no one to laugh or gossip with, but just lived through every dreary, boring day, longing for the doors to open and let me out into life.

The second week the first excitement came with a crash. Sophie sent Aunt Min for me, and we met her in a dressmaker's in the West End. We met her quite early—about ten—and from then on we spent the whole day buying clothes. It was fantastic, mad and glorious, and for me, after four years in the bread-and-butter-and-blue-serge atmosphere at the Misses Mandeville's, it was sheer heaven. Sophie was using a smart little carriage with a coachman and a high-stepping little black horse, and we went jingling through the West End traffic along Bond Street and Regent Street, buying clothes for me. Shoes, stockings of fine silk, underwear of lawn and lace, ruffled and frilled, morning, afternoon and evening clothes, tea gowns, hats, an evening wrap, gloves, fans—everything.

We had three days' shopping that week. We went back for fittings to some places. We also went and had my hair done in

a shop in Bond Street by a little curled and moustached Frenchman who danced about like a bantam cock. I must say when he had finished I was very pleased with the result. He cut some off my hair's enormous length, and he shampooed and singed it, and did it up so that it stayed up, and he put a sky-blue velvet band across it, and suggested I should have ribbons to match each 'toilette', and that for a *jeune fille* so *ravissante* it would be irresistible. When I got back to school that night, wearing a new blue costume and a sailor hat—I downright refused to wear one of those enormous things like lampshades that all the women were wearing—all the girls twittered, and the droopy Miss Mandeville grew quite lyrical and made me feel more than ever that the sooner I got out the better.

I knew, of course, that there was a mystery. That something was going on, that neither Sophie nor Aunt Min had any intention of telling me yet. What it was, I could not guess. I thought that Dan must be making a lot of money to afford to let Sophie have her own carriage, and when I said this she laughed and said it had been 'lent her by a friend'. But she did not say who the friend was, and I wondered, unhappily, if it was the heavy-jowled Lord Woodbourne.

After we had bought a whole lot of things, just before we left the shop she would bring a card out of her little golden card-case, scribble on it, and say to one of the saleswomen 'Send the bill here, will you, miss.' And the saleswomen's faces would change mysteriously, and if they had glanced or whispered together at her blunt London speech before, now they treated her like a queen. Everything we bought, apart from the few things I took back to school, she said, 'Sned them to the Cavendish,' and explained to me that she was living at a hotel until the new place was ready.

'Aren't we going to live at Drovny Street?' I asked. The tall house with its gaming-rooms which I had known such a short while was becoming a vague memory. But Sophie only answered briefly. 'No—it's not suitable for a girl of your age.' And with that I had to be content.

The day when Sophie had made an appointment for me to see Mr. Deward was the Friday before Derby Day. During all those shopping excursions, one thought had been in my mind —to ask Sophie if I could go to the Derby with Brendan; and only the fear that she might say no held me back. She was going to Epsom, I knew, because I had seen the dress she had had made for it. The Derby, she explained to me, was not really a society race-meeting. One needed something smart, but tailored, and her black and white suit of fine tweed, and big white hat with a black wing in it, and her little black and white high-heeled boots, were certainly all of that.

I longed to go to the Derby with Brendan—I did not want to dress up and go in Members with Lord Woodbourne, or with baby-faced Hugh. I wanted my day out with Brendan, and it was on the tip of my tongue so many times to ask if I might go; but somehow I never managed to frame the question. Brendan had said she would not let me go, and I was beginning to think he was right, and, waiting for the right moment to put it to her, the time seemed to fly away.

This day we were lunching in a big restaurant in Piccadilly Circus where the speciality was all kinds of sea-food. Though women did not usually go to these smart restaurants alone, Sophie did not care at all, and the waiters greeted her with the same deference as they would any man, respecting her knowledge of food and wine, and knowing she tipped well for good service. She knew so many people that in a few minutes we were always surrounded by men wanting to kiss her hand, laughing and talking, and trying to flirt with us both, and paying us compliments. Their talk was all of race-meetings and theatre people, of Deauville and Biarritz, of horses and fashions, wine and food, and I could see how they all deferred to Sophie and that she knew a great deal about everything that interested these smart men-about-town. She seemed a great deal older than her twenty-five years, although she always looked radiant, and stunningly turned out. Every head in the room turned as she came in with her little lilting walk. They all called her Mrs. Dan, yet no one ever mentioned Dan, and

neither did she.

But on this day she discouraged her admirers. 'I don't want those mashers around,' she said abruptly, 'I want to talk to you, Rose. George Deward is a good friend of mine, and it's pretty certain he'll have you at the Frivolity. The girls come and go and there's always an opening for a pretty one, and you're very pretty.'

I blushed, and she smiled, and took my hand with the old protective, motherly kindness. It brought a lump to my throat, and made me think that Brendan could not possibly understand her. She looked so lovely with her golden hair and blue eyes and the pretty movements of her little hands. She had a new ring, a single diamond in the shape of a pear, and it went from knuckle to knuckle on the third finger of her left hand, glittering in the light.

'I'm not going to talk to you until I know you're in, Rosie. I've made an appointment for eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. I want you to have a good night's sleep, and take time over dressing. You must be perfect—shoes, stockings, hands ... specially hands. See your nails are polished, and your gloves spotless. Bring an extra pair. We'll go to Aurora's after lunch today and collect that rose-coloured cloth with the accordion pleats. Wear that—it'll be easy to walk in. You don't have to be frightened of old George, he's a dear, but he's a martinet in the theatre. You'll have to look a beauty, and behave like a lady. So now you know.'

But I was scared—I could hardly sleep that night, and I was terribly mixed up, thinking of tomorrow's ordeal, and wishing I had spoken about Derby Day. If the interview went off, I told myself, and Mr. Deward engaged me, then Sophie would be pleased and I could ask her if I might go with Brendan. Surely she would not refuse?

She sent a hired closed cab for me next morning. She was not risking my clothes being soiled by railway travel, or my hair being blown all over the place. I wore the *vieille-rose* gown. It was made of very fine cloth, simply draped and folded over its accordion-pleated under-skirt. I was glad that

the Gibson-girl hour-glass line had gone out, because I was slim and tall and would never have looked like a 'fine woman' however hard I had tried. I was also glad the tiny waist had gone out, though mine was only twenty-three inches, for lacing in until you can't breathe and having perpetual indigestion is not my idea of being well-dressed. I loathed the hats they were wearing that year, so hideous and heavy and shapeless, so Sophie had her milliner make me a moss-green beehive of light coarse straw which was trimmed both under and on the brim with roses of the same *vieille-rose* as my gown.

I got out of the hired cab at the Cavendish, and I saw Sophie's smart little carriage waiting outside. She was obviously waiting for me, for she came sweeping out immediately into the sunshine wearing one of her beautifully-cut dark grey tailored costumes, and a moment later we were jingling off down St. James', turning left into Pall Mall and on towards the Strand.

She sat back and looked me over critically, like a general inspecting the guard. She leant over and pulled the hair a little looser over my forehead, then nodded, satisfied.

'You look stunning, young Rosie. Don't ever let anyone tell you you're anything but a real stunner. And don't be ashamed of it. Don't you listen to these Holy-Joes with their Vale of Tears nonsense, going on about a good-looking girl as though it was a crime to be pretty and a sin to know it. It's nothing of the sort. There's looks, and poise, and self-confidence—and there's something else, that no one has a name for, but that you can see in a man or a woman the minute you set eyes on them. It's a sort of attraction that has nothing to do with education or breeding.' She gave a curious, almost self-mocking little smile. 'It's a thing like brains and beauty, which a common girl can have as well as any lady. It's just something that makes a man know he's a man, and a woman know she's a woman. Do you know what I mean?'

I thought of aquamarine eyes between thick black lashes, and a braced-steel horseman's body, and said thoughtlessly, 'Like Brendan?'

I realised at once that I had made a mistake, as the full barrage of her shrewd blue glance fixed on me.

I went on lamely, 'Well, he's very attractive ...' and I thought of my as-yet-unspoken request, and felt my hopes sink into my new patent kid shoes.

'It's not for you to look for it in men,' she said crisply. 'A man only needs one thing. Money. But you've got it, Rosie. You're going to turn a lot of heads. Make sure you keep yours, until you find the right man.'

'Someone like Hugh Travers, I suppose?' I said sulkily.

She put her head on one side, and made a little half-smile, half-grimace, as though she was thinking, So the baby knows something without me having to spell it out for her.

She said: 'What's wrong with little Hugh?'

'He's—he's ...'—I sought for a description—'he's not a man at all. He's got a face like a girl!'

She was leaning back, very relaxed as she always was, laughing inside herself at me.

'A lot of girls would give their eyes for him. Rich society girls too. He may be just a silly boy now, but one day he'll be Lord Woodbourne, and one of the wealthiest men in England. As Lady Woodbourne, Rosie, you could have a very good time without bothering about Hugh's face.'

I stared at her, trying to fight the revulsion in me. When she was like this, I was never quite sure whether she was serious. She knew this; so, as though she were afraid of driving me too far, she bent forward and put her expensively gloved little hand on mine. There was a deeply affectionate smile in her eyes which reminded me of all the love and protection she had given me for as far back as I could remember and made me feel ashamed and guilty at ever having harboured unkind thoughts about her.

'Don't you worry, my little Rose,' she said lovingly. 'You're only eighteen. You've years to have a good time, and you're going to the right place to have it. Mind you, you're to be a good girl. That pays in the end.'

Her face was suddenly taut.

'If I had had someone to tell me that when I was eighteen,' he said, 'things might have been a lot different.'

The cab trotted up to the stage door of the Frivolity, and she snapped open the tiny watch, encrusted with diamonds and sapphires, which she wore round her neck on a long fine gold chain, and tucked into her waist-belt.

'Dead on time. Good old Jakes.' Jakes was her driver. 'Now, then, don't be scared—answer up—old Deward is no ogre.'

Jakes opened the door, lowered the step and helped us out. I looked up at the ornate front of the building. Cabs and private carriages were drawing up and pretty girls were getting out, some waving goodbye and blowing kisses to escorts, all hurrying towards the stage door. They were all about my height, five feet six inches. they were of every complexion, and every type; but they were all beauties, and all beautifully dressed. Sophie glanced at them, and then at me, and said firmly, 'Old George will be a perishing idiot if he turns you down.'

He did not turn me down. He was a handsome, red-faced, expansive man with curly grey hair—beautifully dressed, and always smiling beneath his clipped moustache. In the stage-door box there was an old fellow with sharp black eyes, who greeted Sophie and told a boy to take us up to 'The Guv'. It was a big office overlooking the Strand, lined with posters and photographs. There was a big desk piled with papers, and the room was crowded with all kinds of things, from model stage sets to patterns of ostrich feathers. I was soon to learn that everything in that theatre went under his personal supervision and that if one of the girls went on in the wrong shoes or dirty gloves he always knew.

He rose and greeted Sophie effusively, kissing her hand, and placing her in the best chair. Then he turned and looked at me, and said:

'Well, and so *this* is the little sister?'

'Will she do, Geo?'

'She'll do—oh, yes, she'll do. Do you want to go on the

stage, my dear?'

I stared at him. Suddenly, I was not scared any more. I found a confidence from somewhere. I said, 'Not particularly. I can't act, if that's what you mean. I want to earn my living somehow. I'd like to be independent. Can you tell me of a better way?'

'No.'

'Well, then I'm very lucky to have this opportunity.'

Something in my manner seemed to worry him. I thought it was perhaps my bluntness, and my youth. Now I know it was my innocence. He looked sharply at Sophie and sat down in his chair, asking her permission to smoke, and lighting a big cigar. I was sitting near Sophie.

'You're sure about this, Sophie? What do you want for the child? You know the temptations for the girls here?'

'There's temptations everywhere for girls as pretty as Rose,' she said stoutly. 'Rose's got her head screwed on all right.'

'This show is good for two kinds of girl,' he said, and he glanced at me kindly. 'The kind who really want to get on the stage and will learn from the experience. And the kind who want to meet rich men.'

'Rose is the last kind,' said my sister crisply. 'Objective matrimony. Look, let's be honest, Geo. She's my sister, and I want the best for her. I can't bring her out, and launch her into society. But from here, with luck, and Woody's help, I might be able to push her through the back door.'

He smiled at her bluntness, but his eyes as he looked at me were doubtful and a little worried. He seemed to be thinking it over.

For an awful moment I thought he was going to turn me down, but finally he said: 'Can you sing, my dear?'

There was a grand piano in the room, and he called in a pianist to accompany me. I sang a popular song. I have a strong tuneful voice, though nothing exceptional, and he seemed pleased. He asked me to walk, to speak, and to show him my legs, so I lifted my skirts and showed him my legs up to the knees in their thin black stockings and didn't feel in the

least embarrassed. He was not that kind of man. You knew that the girls in his shows had to have perfect legs, and therefore he was justified in asking to see them before he engaged you.

Finally he said, 'All right. Billee Townsend is getting married at the end of next week, and you can take over. Be here for rehearsal at ten o'clock Monday week.'

He held out his hand, took mine and kissed me, and said:

'Glad to have you, my dear. If you've any troubles come to me—and I mean it. Have a good time and don't drink. It's the sack for anyone who's caught tipsy in my theatre. Accept presents from the mashers if you wish, but no money; and if any of them get tiresome, come to me. In fact come to me for anything, and if I can help you I will.'

He turned to Sophie and took her hand, kissing her on both cheeks.

'Mrs. Dan, I hope you've done the right thing, but with her looks I'll have to put her near the front, and she'll have every rich boy in London after her.'

As we went out to our carriage the stage-door man touched his forehead and said, 'Morning, Miss Eves,' as though he knew I was already a Frivolity girl, and I felt very proud.

We went to the Hotel Cecil for lunch with Lord Woodbourne and his nephew. It was all very gay. We had lobster, and strawberries, and champagne, and they all laughed a lot and drank to my success as a Frivolity girl and wished me well.

In the middle of it all, the waiter put a little box on my plate with a spray of roses. When I opened it it contained a pretty diamond brooch, shaped like a rose. I stared at it, and they all stared at me.

Hugh Travers flushed under his fine skin, and said, 'It's just a little gift, Miss Eves—I mean Rose, if you don't mind my calling you Rose. Just to celebrate your beginning at the Frivolity. I mean, I just want to be your first admirer.'

I was still silent, looking at the pretty thing, conscious of Sophie's watchful blue eyes and Woodbourne's heavy, smiling

face. Woodbourne said, 'Don't be frightened, Rose, my dear—it's only a trinket. Nothing to the things that will be laid at your pretty feet soon.'

I don't quite know what made me do it. It was all rather mixed up in my mind. Something to do with Brendan, and something to do with myself, something to do with Marjorie and her Aunt Flora and Women's Rights. A woman, Aunt Flora had said, could give herself, but should never be for sale. Of course, my thoughts were not sorted out like that at all. All I know is that I closed the little box quickly, and gave it back to Hugh.

'I'm sorry,' I said, 'I'd rather not. I'll keep the flowers, but—I just don't think I know you well enough to accept anything like that. I'm sorry.'

There was a little pause. Sophie's face gave nothing away. Lord Woodbourne glanced at her and half laughed, and Hugh changed colour again, red to white, and stammered, 'I haven't offended you have I, Miss Eves? I wouldn't do that! Really! Not for the world!'

'Oh, no,' I said, thoughtlessly, sorry for him. 'You can call me Rose, if you like. It's just that it's too much to give me, when I hardly know you and it's not even my birthday.'

His eyes shone, and almost filled with tears, as though I had said something touchingly wonderful and special. For a moment I thought he was going to snatch up my hand and kiss it, so I hurriedly began to fasten the roses to my bodice.

I had mixed feelings about Hugh Travers. It was not that I did not like him, but that I did not like him enough to be bothered with him, and it embarrassed me that he should watch my face and listen to my every word as though it were a pearl of wisdom. It made me want to laugh at him—which would have been unkind, for he was quite sensitive. I thought of Brendan's face with its taut, carved cheekbones, and eyes that laughed or glowered, and wished, stupidly, that it had been he that had given me roses, instead of the emotional Mr. Travers.

Just before we finished luncheon some people passed us go-

ng towards the door, a party of an elderly man and woman, nd a woman of about forty—well dressed, with good jewels, ut not smart, and with a sad, aristocratic face. As this woman ot level with our table she looked at us directly, and I knew he had recognized Lord Woodbourne. He rose and bowed unctiliously, and so did Hugh, and I thought for a moment he as going forward to speak to her; but she looked at Sophie as hough there was no one there—right through her—and her ong sad face had such an expression of frozen disdain that I as startled.

I turned to look at Sophie. She put out her pretty white and, the left hand with the big new diamond, and took a fat ed strawberry from the bowl on the table and bit into it, her retty little teeth closing like a cat biting the head off a mouse, nd her blue eyes looked straight into the other woman's, parkling with mischief and defiance.

Woodbourne's heavy face was suffused with sullen fury, but Sophie put her little hand upon his arm, making him sit down gain by her, taking another strawberry, popping it into his nouth, and saying, 'What a frightful cross face, Woody! Cheer up!'

He relaxed and began to smile.

'When a man's been surrounded by long faces all his life, Sophie, my dear, he'll give a great deal for a little happiness nd laughter.'

She bit into another strawberry. 'What will he give?'

'He'll give what's he's asked.'

She laughed, tilting her pretty head, and said, 'Careful, I night ask for the moon.'

'Sophie, I'm sorry about that encounter.'

She smiled into his eyes, and I saw desire quicken in his eavy face as she said, 'What encounter? I didn't see anyhing!' She rose, collecting her gloves, parasol and little handag. 'I must drive Rose to the station.'

'I shall see you later?'

'Yes, of course.'

He and Hugh saw us to the carriage, and we drove off to

London Bridge, where Aunt Min was to meet me and accompany me back to school, for I was to stay there for one more week.

Sophie took off her glove, thoughtfully nibbling the point of a polished pink fingernail.

'You handled that perfectly, Rosie,' she said.

'What?'

'The brooch from young Travers. He knows you're a good girl now, but he doesn't know what you think of him. That'll keep him on his toes, all right.'

I stared blankly. 'I never thought of it that way.' She laughed, her deep mischievous chuckle. 'Too right you didn't, ducks, as the Aussies say. It was because you did it so spontaneous-like, it was so perfect.'

'Sophie, who was the lady who—who knew Lord Woodbourne but didn't seem to know you?'

Sophie looked at me, her eyes again sparkling with amusement, devilry, laughter and anger. In some moods she reminded me of the spray of a fountain when the rainbows play over it, with the colours always moving, so you never know what she was thinking. Perhaps only Aunt Min and I, who had always known her from the beginning when she was a young ster singing her way round the pubs and halls of the East End, knew of the dark side to her, the bitter, implacable will of her that underlay this gay and sparkling surface. I could glimpse it now under the rainbow gaiety.

'She knew me all right,' she said steadily. 'That was Lady Woodbourne. That was Woody's dear wife and her father and her mother. She knew me all right, and I know her. And if she's no better weapons to fight for her happiness with than a long face and her ladylike misery, she damn well deserves to lose it.'

I was shocked into silence—at sea—not understanding—knowing everything had changed, but not how or why. We were bowling along the Strand, passing the Frivolity again: my future that promised to be so gay.

Sophie did not speak until we were in sight of the station

and we could see Aunt Min's little black-clad figure waiting patiently in the entrance.

'You might as well know, Rose. You'll have to know sooner or later. I've left Dan.'

'But Sophie,' I exclaimed, 'he loved you! I mean I know he was a bit rough—I mean, not a gentleman, not like Lord Woodbourne—but he was kind, Sophie, and he loved you terribly!'

She looked at me, and the blue eyes were like turquoise stones, they were so hard. 'He's had his due,' she said. 'I don't owe him nothing. And some kind of living can be as sickening as hating.' Her chin jerked up with a sudden defiance. 'No man, no damned man in the whole world, is going to own me, our Rose. I'm on loan only. I belong to no one but myself.'

I was shocked and bewildered, and she saw it. Her face cleared, and she moved to my side with a rustle of taffeta underskirt and a waft of perfume, lifted her veil and kissed me.

She was my sister, and she loved me, and this made everything worse. I wanted her to stand above me and lead the way, because she was older and wiser, and knew so much about life—but she only told me what she wanted.

She brought out a handkerchief, a scrap of cambric and rosepoint lace, and dabbed my eyes.

'Don't cry, lovey. Nothing's going to hurt you.'

'What about Brendan?' I wailed. 'If you don't like Dan does that mean we shan't see Brendan either?'

She withdrew immediately from her tenderness, her eyes sharp and wary.

'You like Brendan, don't you, Rose?'

'Yes.'

'A little bit gone on him, perhaps?'

'I don't know,' I faltered. How could I know? I only knew my heart raced when he touched me and that he haunted my waking dreams. 'I like him very much. He's always nice to me. Don't you like him, Sophie?'

A touch of colour came up her face, and I was surprised. I

could not remember ever seeing Sophie change colour before.

'I'll say this for Brendan,' she said, her voice harsh and decisive. 'He's a man. There aren't many about. But we can't afford fancies, Rose. The Bradys have to much temper. You can forget all that nonsense, Rose, I haven't gone to all this trouble over you to have you marry an Irish horse-coper.'

The request that I might spend the day with Brendan at Epsom had been trembling on my tongue, but I did not ask her; for there was something ruthless and determined in me just as there was in her, and I knew that if it were possible, I *was* going to meet him, and that it would be easier for me afterwards if she had not expressly forbidden it. So I said nothing, but said goodbye, and kissed her, and got out of the carriage. Aunt Min looked at our faces, her own little old round face apprehensive, then hurried me off to the train as Jakes whipped up the horses and drove Sophie away.

It was mid-afternoon, and we got a first-class compartment to ourselves. Aunt Min took off her black cotton gloves and produced some mint humbugs—they were her only vice. I stuck my smart hat in the rack, and lolled back, forgetting the *vieille-rose* dress and my uncertain future, sucking a humbug and gratefully becoming eighteen again. Aunt Min shot a black, beady glance at me and said curiously, 'Has she told you?'

'That she's left Dan?'

'Is that all she's told you?'

'What else is there?'

'Whatever there is she'll tell you in her own good time. It won't do no good me sticking my spoke in.'

'What was it? What happened between them? Is it—Lord Woodbourne?'

Aunt Min looked at me, her wrinkled cheek bulged out over a humbug. Then she said cautiously, 'As like as not.'

'But—Dan was so kind!'

'Kind!' said Aunt Min, suddenly communicative. 'Kind! What does she care about kindness? Throws men off when she's no use for them like orange peel. You don't have to pay

back the whole sex, I says, just because your dad was a rotter and because one young chap did you wrong. If we all did that, I said, it would be a pretty kettle of fish. I reckon three-quarters o' the world would be at each other's throats! But you can't tell 'er. Nothing'll alter 'er now.'

I said quickly, 'What do you mean, Aunt Min? Who did her wrong?'

She realised she had said too much, and began one of her grumbling evasions about 'never you mind' and 'what you don't know won't hurt you'. But I said quickly:

'Aunt Min, I'm sick of being treated like a child. What do you mean? Was it André? You remember—years ago, when we were in Hackney, and Mama was still alive?'

I waited, and as she said nothing I went on, 'If you don't tell me I'll ask her myself.'

'For pity's sake, Rosie, don't do that. Don't mention it to her, or she'll have me skinned. All right. I didn't think you'd remember. Yes, it was.'

'What happened?'

'Well, she was just a nipper then, just eighteen, and your dad got her these jobs round the pubs singing, and she met this Frenchy and he used to play for her, like. Well, it was a rough life, and there were always men after her, and this André he was real gentlemanly, and he used to take care of her, and keep the toughs off, and bring her home—and she being young and silly, she lost her head.'

'Do you mean she—she . . . ?' I didn't know how to say it. All the words to say what I meant seemed wrong or vulgar or inadequate.

'Yes, they got together all right, and then she found she was in the family way, and of course when she told him, he went off.'

I was horrified. 'What did she do?'

'Oh, she didn't have it. She went to some woman over in Lambeth who'd been a nurse, and she was ill for a bit. Scared me. One time I thought she might die.'

'I remember she was ill.'

'Well, what else could she do, poor lamb? Your dad was no use, and your mother weeping and wailing. It put Sophie right off your mum, that did. She said to me, when I get over this. Aunt Min, there's two things I'm never going to do. I'm never going to fall in love again. And I'm not going to be a useless, sloppy lady like Mama wants me to be.'

'And she never saw him again?' I asked.

Aunt Min looked uncomfortable. 'Oh, yes, she saw him. He came into Drovny Street about a year after she married Dan. She was a star turn at Drovny Street, and I don't know what Dan will do without her. Half the toffs came to see Mrs. Dan as much as to play. Well she was very, very nice to him. Never mentioned old times. But she saw him into a baccarat school where he couldn't afford to play, and when he was cleaned right out, penniless, she told the doorman he was not to be admitted again. She brought up a bottle of champagne that night, and split it with me. "That's an old score paid off, Min," she said.'

She was silent for a moment, her wrinkled ivory-coloured eyelids closed fast. I thought she had gone to sleep, but th little black eyes snapped open.

'But she oughtn't to have done this to Dan. He was alway kind to her. Always generous. And he's crazy mad with love for her and with jealousy. That was half the trouble at Drovny Street. If I was her, I'd be looking over my shoulder. A man can be kicked too hard, and I reckon she's done that to Dan—and she's a fool to do it. She may be tired of him, but he never did her any harm. She wants to look out for herself.'

I found myself shivering in spite of the summer day. All the lightness, the rainbow colours of the morning, had gone. I was seeing being a woman in Sophie's world from another angle, and seeing my sister from another angle, and I did not like what I saw. It seemed dark, sordid and threatening, yet it was my world, and I could not get away from it. It was the only world I knew.

On the morning of Derby Day, the following week, I got up

before anyone in the school was stirring. I put on a plain dress of grey muslin, and a grey straw hat, and took my handbag, and crept out by the kitchen door. I left a note to say I had gone out for the day and would be back in the evening. I knew they wouldn't find me that day, and as I was leaving school for ever on the Friday, there was nothing much they could do in the way of punishment.

I caught a train to London Bridge, and with great trepidation went on the District Line from there to Victoria. At Victoria I caught a train to Epsom.

The train to Epsom was already full of people going early to the races. They all seemed very jolly and nice to me, and in spite of the fact that for the first time in my life I was making a journey alone no one attacked me or did or said anything unpleasant, so I began to think Sophie and the Misses Mandeville had exaggerated the dangers a young girl was exposed to when travelling.

I walked from the station to Vestry's stables. It was about three miles, and for half the way I went with the crowd. It was not in full flood, because it was so early, but it was growing all the time. Costers in their shays, all befeathered and pearled, wagonettes and horse-charabancs with parties; hucksters and salesmen, and country fellows walking to the course; gipsies with their brown skins and tow-coloured Sussex hair, whining and begging with their babies on their arms, all the excitement that Brendan had told me about was beginning to mount as the crowd grew and grew and streamed towards the Downs like ants swarming in the summer.

I got to the stables at about nine. I knocked on the door, and Mrs. Vestry herself opened it.

She stared in surprise, and I said: 'Brendan said he would take me to the races if I got here early.'

She laughed, and took me into the big sunny kitchen. They were at breakfast, and when Brendan looked at me I knew he knew about Dan and Sophie, but I was not going to let that spoil my day.

'You said you'd take me if I got here early,' I said. 'Is this

early enough?' And the look in his face changed to amusement, and his sweet smile, that always went round me like tender arms, came back, so I knew that it was going to be a happy day.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was a glorious day. I still say sometimes that it was the happiest day of my life—except for the gipsy—and I have had some gloriously happy days since then. But there is happiness and happiness, and love and love, and there is nothing quite so vivid as that first wild happiness of knowing you are in love, of being very young and inexperienced and uncritical and being with your loved one on a glorious day in June. The happiness that comes afterwards is quite different Just as important and sweet, but never quite so vivid. On that day on the Downs with Brendan it seemed as though the very air I breathed was champagne.

Mr. Vestry said that so long as Brendan was at the saddling enclosure an hour before the racing started, to take the horse down to the paddock before the race, we could do what we liked during the morning. The colt, The Grayling, had had every attention that a horse could have, and had been taken over to the course the night before and was therefore already safely 'arrived' with his personal stable lad. The Grayling, though well fancied, was not among the favourites, although from the talk around the breakfast table that morning it was obvious that the Vestry stable thought they had a very good chance.

Mrs. Vestry, already dressed in a tight new dress of spotted foulard, was already in a great state of excitement. She said that if I would meet her before the race she would take me to

the paddock to see the Royalty, and into Tattersalls with her. She showed me her new hat, one of the new big lampshade ones made of royal blue velvet, and teased me saying I looked like a little nun in my pale grey muslin with white *broderie anglaise* collar and cuffs; but I saw my face in her bedroom mirror, pink as a rose, blue eyes sparkling with joy, and there was nothing nun-like about that.

Brendan was tall and elegant in his riding breeches and whipcord coat, a cap cocked on his dark curly head, and when we went off I was as excited as a child let out of school. There were the Downs under the summer sun, as Brendan had said they would be, covered with this great mass of people. People were still pouring in from everywhere. There were tents and balloons, hurdy-gurdies and roundabouts, side-shows, tipsters, men tying themselves in chains or padlocking themselves in sacks and miraculously escaping, acrobats and conjurers and bookmakers. There were stalls with pies and sandwiches, and hard-boiled eggs and tea and coffee, and bars with whelks and winkles, and even bars with oysers and stout and champagne.

The noise went up like the hum of a vast swarm of bees, and if you could have been suspended half a mile above it all in a balloon, that is what it would have looked like. Every road for miles around was black with people all converging on this green downland, and everyone, with that wonderful mass gaiety of the Cockney, seemed determined to have a good time.

We walked all over the course, my hand in Brendan's, my heart singing inside me like a lark in the sunshine, lost in that lovely day. We saw the Bearded Lady, and the Smallest Man and the Fattest Woman in the World. We saw the Gay Girls from Paree, a shabby troupe of can-can dancers—and I pretended not to be shocked, though I must say the sight of so much grubby frilled-knicker brought the colour to my cheeks and made Brendan laugh at me. We threw disks, we rolled pennies, we shyed for coconuts, Brendan tried feats of strength and laughed at my pride when he clanged the bell the first time. We rode on a scarlet and gold dragon on the roundabout,

sailing along to the tum-ti-tum music, with his arms closely round me and his cheek against my hair. The brown hands clasped beneath my breast sent fountains of delight through my veins. He turned his lips against my cheek and said, 'Your heart is going like a little trapped bird, Rose.'

And I said, 'It's going so fast!' meaning the roundabout and knowing he could not be deceived, for a wooden roundabout held no fear for me who could manage a real horse.

At about midday it was hot, so we bought some bread rolls filled with ham, some fruit and a bottle of champagne, and went into the birch woods to eat. The champagne was cheap sweet and warm. We sat on a newspaper, our backs propped against a fallen log, and I took off my hat. Though the great humming-bee-swarm of the course was barely a quarter of a mile away, I felt as if I was sitting on a golden cloud high above the world and drinking nectar with the gods.

Brendan's arm, resting along the log, closed round me, so that I turned, smiling, knowing, as a girl does, that he wanted to kiss me, and I was waiting to be kissed like a flower opening to the sun. He touched my hair, bound with a rose-coloured ribbon, and said, 'It stays up now?'

'I had it cut.'

'When it used to fall down all over your shoulders it was so lovely. That day on the course here, when the string nearly ran you down, and I thought you and your friend were a couple of gipsies with your head in scarves, and then when I came over and you were sitting on the grass—with all that hair about you like a bonny cloak, I thought you were prettier than anything I'd ever seen.'

He bent his head and laid his lips on mine, and life stopped in a sort of silence, so that I could hear nothing but my heart beating, and see nothing but light brighter than the sun. Then he raised his head, and his eyes were near to mine, and I could see the green and blue lights in them lit with warmth like the sea on a sunny day, and not frozen with anger or distaste as I had sometimes seen them. 'Prettier than anything I'd ever seen,' he repeated.

I don't know what made me say it. Vanity perhaps, or that grain of suspicion that Marjorie's words, 'Or perhaps he likes her too well,' had put into my mind. The minute I said it I regretted it, knowing I myself had struck the magic out of our lovely day. But I was young, and in love, and he was older than me; a young man who had known other women, and I was a green girl. I said, 'Prettier than Sophie?'

His arm dropped. He rose, walked away, came back and put out his hand to help me to my feet. 'Come along,' he said. 'We'll have to go back to the course.'

I rose, my throat tight with unshed tears, bewilderment and jealousy. I said angrily, 'Why do you always change at Sophie's name? Are you so fond of her that you can't bear to mention her? She is pretty, isn't she?'

He stood there silently, and then said, 'Yes. She's pretty, all right.'

'Am I as pretty? Am I like her?'

He looked at me and said, 'Yes, you're very like her. Don't be too like her, Rose.'

'What does everyone like about her?' I said insistently. 'All men like her. Why?'

He said slowly, 'Men like her because she's a man's woman, Rose. In this age where the ideal is a milk-and-water lady, too delicate to work, too refined for love, shocked at a breath and frightened of a mouse, Sophie is a man's woman—unshockable, tough, gutsy, fun, yet pretty and feminine as a picture.'

I had never heard him express any admiration for her before, and I was shaken and jealous. Suddenly I felt so much younger than he. I was resentful of my youth, and scared at the tone in which he added, 'But she uses her power like a whore!'

'Brendan!'

'What's the matter? Has she made such a lady out of you that you're shocked at the truth? You know she's left Dan?'

'Oh, yes. She told me.' I forgot my own distress. 'I am sorry, Brendan.'

'It isn't your fault.'

'It is in a way. I've been using his money too, though I didn't know. Schools, clothes—it all came from Dan. I'm fond of him. He was so kind. Please, Brendan, believe me—I know what Sophie and I owe him . . .'

He cut me short. 'You owe him nothing! And she says she doesn't—even if she has broken his heart and ruined his life. You heard her say once she paid her dues. I suppose she has, in the only way her kind of woman can.' His face was sombre. 'It's not that. I'm not one of these men who make a woman into an angel, and then throw her into the dirt when she can't live up to it. But she need not have married Dan. She need not have led him into a false happiness. Dan loved her. He would have helped her anyway. She didn't need to do what she did.'

'What was that?' I asked fearfully.

'She lived with him, and she worked for him, she made that place in Drovny Street pay as it has never paid before. Mrs. Dan—everyone came to see her. Every man-about-town was her slave. She gave Dan everything but affection and loyalty. Now she has the chance of something better, so she's ditching him. And he's still crazy for her.'

We were walking towards the edge of the spinney, and the roar of the course came nearer. His hands were in his pocket, and he stared moodily ahead.

'What is she going to do, Brendan?' I said anxiously. 'What is she going to do? I mean it's a good thing I'm starting at the Frivolity. It isn't much, I know. Five pounds a week. But it's something. D'you think she'll go back on the stage again as a singer?'

He stopped, and stared at me, and said incredulously, 'Why should she do that?'

Then suddenly his face cleared, and he threw his head back and laughed; but the laughter was not gay as our laughter had been earlier that day. I stood silently, my lips trembling between laughter and tears, not knowing why he laughed. But he picked me up and swung me round, and set me on my feet again, and said:

'My Bunting, my little little Bunting, she certainly won't

do that. Don't you worry—she will tell you in her own good time, and when she does, remember this—that in the pond Sophie swims in, Hugh Travers is a very big fish indeed, and I am a very small one, and this is something you'll have to think of very deeply, my lovely Bunting.'

He took my hand again, swinging it in his. 'Come on, we must hurry. I promised the Guvnor I'd be at the saddling enclosure at one.'

I did not understand—but I sensed his withdrawal. When he had kissed me, a man of his experience must have known I was his for the taking. If he had told me he loved me, and asked me to run away to Australia, or the moon, I would have gone. But something stood between us, which he recognised, but which I could not, and which made him hold back; and I knew it was something to do with my sister Sophie. But whatever it was, it was obvious that Brendan had put her out of his mind and recovered his spirits, and we set off at a sharp walk through the hot sunshine to the saddling enclosure behind the grandstand.

As we pushed our way to the gate to cross the course a gipsy stopped us, clawing on to my arm with her grubby hand. She was not one of the fair-haired, snub-featured, Sussex gipsies, but a real gitano, hawk-featured and black-eyed, with a dark baby slung on her hip.

Brendan said impatiently, 'Not now—we haven't time!' She whined that it would only take a minute, and luck would be with us all day, so he took half a crown from his pocket and gave it to her, telling her to be off.

But as his fingers touched hers, she withdrew her hand sharply as though it had been burned, and stood looking at us over the baby's little dark head.

The three of us stood there, held together by the crowd crushing into the narrow gateway to cross the course to the stand side. Though the crowd was at its thickest the woman did not move, but stood before us with a curious trance-like expression, muttering some words in a strange language—Romany, I suppose.

Brendan said good-temperedly, 'Move over, like a good girl, we want to cross the course.'

She said suddenly, 'The darkness of death will touch you before the sunrise.'

'Before tomorrow?' I asked, scared.

'They always talk in riddles!' Brendan said irritably.

She shook her head angrily. 'Not tomorrow. Before the sunrise of happiness, you will walk through the shadow of a death.'

Brendan lost patience and moved her to one side, pulling me through after him, and we crossed the course and made our way to the saddling enclosure. Mr. Vestry was there, and Mrs. Vestry. They had kindly bought me a ticket for Tattersalls, and I pinned the cardboard disk to the bodice of my dress. The Grayling, Lord Woodbourne's horse for the big race, a tall, handsome dark grey with a white star, was being walked by his lad.

We were in the very core and heart-beat of this great racing day. Here were the three-year-olds, the aristocrats, the blood horses, the descendants of the Darley Arab, the Byerley Turk and the great Eclipse—the best of their year waiting for their test. By their running today, future dynasties would be determined. Suddenly, with the men deep in their own world, I felt out of place. And I was delighted when before the big race Mrs. Vestry, impressive in her fashionable curves and enormous hat, suggested we should go down to the paddock to 'see the Royalty'.

'I always go every year, my dear,' she confided, 'and at all the big meetings. For the truth is, I enjoy looking at the toffs more than I do the horses. Horses, so to speak, are my bread and butter, and there's one thing I've learned about racing men, whether they're owners, trainers, stable boys or just punters—they don't want women around when their minds are full of horses.'

We joined the crowd on the paddock rails, and the hats came off and there was a ripple of applause as the royal party entered. 'If we leave just after They leave,' said Mrs. Vestry,

'we can get back to the stand just in time for the race.'

I saw the bearded King and the pretty, painted little Queen and a lot of imposing gentlemen in frock coats and top hats and a lot of smart ladies with big hats and parasols. Mrs. Vestry was a veritable Who's-Who. She pointed out the well-known society people, including Mrs. George Keppel, 'whom they say His Majesty is very struck with'.

The horses were coming in now, and the jockeys, looking slender and childish in their fluttering silks, were saluting their owners and listening politely to their instructions. I wondered how many of them remembered, when they were up in the saddle. That's when a jockey knows what a horse can do, Brendan had told me, when the horse is there between his knees. I saw him come in leading The Grayling, leaning against the tug of the horse's strong neck to keep him walking steadily round the paddock.

Mrs. Vestry drew her breath sharply, and I felt her glance at me, and away again. Sophie had come into the paddock.

She came in on Woodbourne's arm, like an actress taking the limelight, knowing full well that every eye there was fixed upon her. She wore the thin black and white suit, the white hat with the black wing, a high-boned blouse of white lace falling in snowy ruffles, pinned by a diamond brooch. Her small white-gloved hands held a black and scarlet parasol. She glanced round the paddock, talking to Woodbourne, smiling, laughing with the well-dressed, fashionable young men who followed them. There was no other woman in that party.

I shrank back behind Mrs. Vestry's shoulder and large hat so that I should not be seen. I heard a smart woman behind me say, 'My goodness, Woodbourne is impudent enough, flaunting his woman here before everyone!' I felt my cheeks burn scarlet, realising the implication of what she had said. I remembered my naive words to Brendan earlier, and his ironic laughter, and something inside me curled like a prodded sea-anemone.

When Sophie saw Brendan the sparkle left the pretty face. For a moment she lost all animation, watching the tall, hand-

some young man leading the horse. Something, a movement in the crowd, set the thoroughbred dancing, and Brendan moved with it, pulling down the jerking head, soothing and quietening it, horse and man a picture of grace and strength.

Woodbourne spoke to her, and she started, and replied, and whatever she said set all the men around her off in a gust of laughter, and she was all sparkling and smiling again; but I knew that for a moment I had seen behind the mask my sister wore, the mask of gaiety and worldliness and brash disregard for conventions. I had seen, just for a moment, a young woman looking at a man with her heart in her eyes.

I turned my head away sharply, my cheeks still hot, and misery burning inside me. I shut my eyes, trying to control the hot tears that clung to my lashes and stung my eyelids. I did not want Mrs. Vestry to see. When I opened them again, Brendan had led the horse over to its owner and Woodbourne was inspecting it. While Sophie was the centre of her court of smart men-about-town, Brendan stood, holding The Grayling's head, very quiet, not speaking to anyone, not looking at her.

The royal party began to move away, and hats swept off, and there were murmurs of 'Good old Teddy . . .' Mrs. Vestry said, 'We'd best be getting back to our place, my dear, if we want to see the race.'

I was following her through the crowd, when suddenly I saw Dan. I was shocked by his appearance. He, who was always so smartly if a trifle flashily dressed, looked unkempt. He seemed to have shrunk, the ruddy handsomeness reduced to a haggard, hollow-eyed and ravaged leanness. He was standing, as I had been standing, screened from the paddock by the big fashionable hat of the woman before him. His lips were working silently, as though he was praying or cursing to himself, and I knew he was watching his wife.

She stood at the horse's head between Woodbourne and Brendan, glancing from one to the other, and then she put her arm through Woodbourne's with a possessive little gesture as though proclaiming to everyone that this was the man she had

chosen. Brendan held The Grayling while Mr. Vestry gave the jockey a hand up into the saddle, and in a moment the horse was striding off towards the course, Brendan still straining at its head. He did not once look at Sophie. I turned quickly, but Dan had disappeared.

We got into Tattersalls and into the stand just as the horses began the long climb over the Downs to the start. Every eye was strained towards those dancing spots of colour up at the start, everyone was talking about the race, the ring was a frantic bellow of voices and frantic flutter of white gloves as the odds were signalled down the course. Then they were off.

The coloured dots of the jockeys' caps darted forward, moving smoothly, disappearing behind the bushes, appearing again along the long rise, then plunging down the hill towards Tattenham Corner, Lord Woodbourne's colours showing with the leaders. I wondered if I was the only person in that crowd who stared towards them with unseeing eyes and hardly heard the gathering roar of voices as the horses came thundering down to the sharp turn into the straight. I was in a private world of threatening shadows and fears, of passions and undercurrents which I did not understand. Or rather, I understood some things only too clearly: that my sister Sophie had left her husband to become Lord Woodbourne's mistress, but that if she loved anyone it was not Woodbourne but Brendan Brady, the man with whom I believed myself in love.

As the horses reached Tattenham Corner I heard a gasp and shout from the crowd, and Mrs. Vestry grasped me excitedly by the arm. The horses were coming up the long pull to the winning post, but now Lord Woodbourne's pink and purple were not with the leaders.

'What happened? What happened?' I cried.

'It was interfered with—pushed out.' It was the man next to me speaking. I have noticed often during a race how perfect strangers speak to one another. 'The jockey was thrown.' I strained forward, and saw the pink and purple right down the course. The Grayling was running loose, and the jockey walking. The field came by, the name of the winner becoming a

great roar as it passed the post. Then Brendan came out on the course and ran down towards the loose horse and its limping jockey.

'Brendan will catch him,' said Mrs. Vestry. 'We'd better be getting back. His lordship will have something to say about this, I've no doubt. He's not a man who takes a beating lightly.'

We started back towards the saddling enclosure, pushing through the moving mass of people. I felt tired and sick with the crowds and heat, with the emotion of the day. I had been up since dawn and travelled and walked a long way, and I had been up to the peaks of happiness and descended to a new and bewildering unhappiness, and I was too young and inexperienced to sort it all out.

I was still seeing things in the clear-cut, straightforward way of the very young. If Brendan was attracted to Sophie, why then had he kissed me? If Sophie loved Brendan, why had she gone to Lord Woodbourne? To me it seemed such a simple thing to follow your heart—or it had been, until today.

I had quite forgotten I was here without permission, that I was playing truant, that Sophie did not know I was at the races, until I came up to the group around Lord Woodbourne's horse and confronted Sophie's astonished and angry stare.

'Rose! And what may you be doing here, may I ask?'

I stared round the circle of faces apprehensively. Brendan looked across at me, and a flicker of amusement passed across the faces of the fashionable young men who seemed to follow Sophie about like a well-trained musical-comedy chorus. I had already met some of them at luncheon during our shopping trips in the West End.

I was acutely conscious of their bold and admiring glances, and so too was Brendan. I went to Sophie's side, and said as nonchalantly as I could, 'Brendan said weeks ago that he'd take me to the Derby if I could get down to Epsom, so I came.'

'You didn't ask my permission, Miss Impudence! And what

about that school where they are supposed to look after you so wonderfully?'

'I didn't tell them. I just left early. I'm leaving at the end of the week anyhow. And I didn't ask you, Sophie, because—well, because I thought you wouldn't let me come!'

There was a suppressed ripple of laughter round the well-trained chorus. Her blue eyes sparked with anger. There was no softness about her now. She was all the worldly Mrs. Dan, quick-thinking, blunt-spoken. 'You're damn right I wouldn't!' she said crisply. 'What on earth will people think of you, traipsing about the Downs alone?'

'I wasn't alone.'

Brendan spoke for the first time. 'You were with me, Rose,' he said mockingly. 'You are compromised. Don't you know that? Purity is marketable and must not be touched by a breath of doubt. If you don't know, your sister will soon teach you that sort of dirty thinking!'

The were standing glaring at each other in a deadly sort of anger. Lord Woodbourne and Mr. Vestry, catching the note of high-pitched anger, left the horse with the lad and came to Sophie's side. The fashionable young men glanced and whispered. People passing stopped to look and listen. It was that awful and delightfully scandalous thing—a scene.

'Go on,' gibed Brendan, 'tell her it'll spoil her chances on the auction block when she goes to the Frivolity!'

'You be quiet, Brendan,' she said with an intense and equal savagery. 'I'm not taking any more from the Bradys.'

He laughed, the same ironic, ugly laughter I had heard earlier, and it made me shiver. 'You've taken damn nigh everything from one Brady already! You've bled him dry, and now you're moving to a higher bidder. And you're putting a high reserve on this little one, aren't you, before she goes up for sale?'

I saw Hugh Travers's girlish face go white with fury, and he stepped forward, stuttering with protest, but Brendan just moved him easily to one side like a child.

'Brendan, don't be a fool,' Mr. Vestry said sharply.

'Brady, you'd better watch your manners before my guests,' drawled Woodbourne. He was standing between Sophie and Brendan, and his heavy, full-blooded face stared insolently into the younger man's eyes. 'We don't want any of your Irish temper here!'

'Mrs. Brady may be your guest, my Lord, but she is also my brother's wife—although both of you appear to have forgotten it!'

I thought Woodbourne was going to strike Brendan, but Sophie's hand went quickly to his arm. He turned, and said to Vestry, 'Do you need this sort of insolent pup at your place?'

'Brendan is my best man,' said Mr. Vestry stolidly.

'Well, if you want it that way, that's your affair. I don't want to move my nags to another stable, but I may have to.'

Brendan said, 'You don't have to choose between men and your living, Mr. Vestry.' He put on his cap, and turned to me, but before he could speak, Sophie said quickly:

'I can look after Rose.'

He paused, and turned and smiled into her eyes, and said, '*You'd better!* You'd better look after yourself too. You've driven Dan to desperation, and if he crossed your path he might do you some harm—you and your aristocratic friend!'

He turned, and strode off into the crowd. I saw a quick, significant glance pass between Sophie and Woodbourne, and then, as suddenly as it had begun, the scene was over. Emotions had run raw and red, but how adept these people were in covering up, in keeping up the frontage, in pretending nothing had happened, in keeping up the form.

Sophie took charge of me for the rest of the afternoon. I went with them to the paddock, little Hugh dancing attendance at my side, surrounded by the men who followed my sister and who suddenly seemed to find me desirable as well. I heard their remarks—'Mrs. Dan's pretty sister'—'Starting at the old Frivolity, I hear'—'Perfect English rose, old boy, and a good girl too.' I felt like a promising filly on parade.

Lord Woodbourne took us into Members, and there was champagne. Good champagne this time, not the cheap stuff

Brendan and I had bought so happily from a bar on the course. Among this ultra-smart, semi-theatrical crowd, I suppose I created something of a sensation in my simple grey dress and grey straw hat. But I wished I was anywhere else in the world, and I wondered all the time about Brendan, what he would do if he did not go back to work with Mr. Vestry. Would he, perhaps, go to Australia, without even telling me?

The racing had finished, and Sophie, her arm in mine, smiling and gay, was chiding me for my naughtiness, saying to Woodbourne, 'I think it's time I had this naughty girl in my care, don't you, Woody darling? She had better come home with me.'

'To Bayswater?'

'Yes.'

'If you wish it, m'dear.'

So I went back to London with her and Hugh Travers and another man, in Lord Woodbourne's four-in-hand, his lordship handling the reins himself, sitting up on the box with his coachman.

I did not know the other man who drove in the carriage with us. He was much older than the usual 'chorus' and he sat next to Sophie talking all the time about stocks and shares in a thick German accent. He was very expensively dressed and had an orchid in his buttonhole and exuded an aroma of expensive cigars. He was, I gathered, very rich, and I could see that Woodbourne was jealous and uneasy, glancing down from his place on the box and making remarks to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*.

Hugh whispered to me that the dark man, Berman, was a South African diamond man. 'Rolling in money—could buy even Uncle Courtney up. Bit of a boor, though, what?'

I realised this was a pun—South Africa—Boer—boor—and I managed a feeble smile.

But I was beginning to like Hugh Travers. In spite of his clothes, and his money, and his aristocratic connections, he was really a very simple sort of boy, and all the stupid things he did were because he felt that this was what a real man

should do. I could imagine him being very happy in the country, occupied with farming and country things, if, somewhere along the line, perhaps at his school, he had not got the idea that he should try to be a man-about-town.

Hugh explained to me that his uncle was one of the best whips in England, and only kept this four-in-hand and team of greys for occasions like this. The drive to and from Epsom was part of Derby Day, bowling along the roads among the costers, the brakes and wagonettes. Through the villages, and especially as we drew near London, the ragged children, many of them barefoot, were standing by the roads, shouting to the racegoers, 'Chuck out your mouldies! Chuck out your mouldy coppers!' They ran along by the carriages, sometimes hanging on behind, and the lucky gamblers would throw out their coppers and small change for them to scramble for in the dust, and the coachmen would crack their whips round the back of the carriages to dislodge them.

Once we stopped, at a public house near Morden. The yard was crowded with carriages and Cockney shays, and our four-in-hand made quite a sensation. He stopped because Sophie was thirsty, and when I saw her there, so perfumed and elegant, pushing back her veil and dipping her nose into a pint pot, her blue eyes sparkling at Woodbourne over the rim, I understood what Brendan meant about her being a man's woman. I was all mixed up because I loved her so much, and there was so much about her that was so wonderful, just as there was so much that was bewildering and frightening.

We drove on through the suburbs and over the Albert Bridge. Mr. Berman was dropped in St. James's before we stopped outside Lord Woodbourne's big house in Mayfair. He got down and threw the reins up to the coachman, and Hugh got down too. Lord Woodbourne came to the side of the carriage and took Sophie's hand.

'The man will drive you back, m'dear, and I'll call for you about eight.'

Hugh looked at me, and then hopefully at Sophie; but she shook her head, glancing at me, and said, 'Some other time,

Mr. Travers—Rose has had a long day, I reckon.'

So the carriage started off again, bowling through the Park behind the four greys, and Sophie and I sat in silence, each waiting for the other to start talking.

She said, 'I'll send a wire to school to say you're with me.'

'I left a note,' I said loftily.

I saw the glint in her eyes at my voice, and she said, 'Don't use that tone of voice to me, young Rose. No matter what I've done, or what I am, don't forget you'd be a skivvy or a shop girl or a tart, if I hadn't looked after you. So look lively, and thank God for the roof over your head and a decent meal each day.'

I coloured and hung my head, knowing it was true—it was not for me to be critical of Sophie when everything I had ever had had come from her. But the thought did not make me happier, or lift the weight from my heart.

The carriage stopped in a pleasant square in Bayswater outside a smart white house with pink geraniums and striped window awnings. The man leapt down, put down the steps, and helped us alight, touching his cap and smiling as Sophie stopped and gave him half a sovereign and thanked him for his trouble. With people who served her she was always generous and considerate. 'I never forget it might have been t'other way round,' she would say.

She led the way up into the pillared portico and rang, and Aunt Min, neat as ever in black, opened the door. When she saw me she exclaimed, but she folded me in her arms and gave me a smacking kiss.

'And where might you have sprung from?' she demanded. 'Your room's ready, but I wasn't rightly expecting you until next week. All your clothes haven't been delivered yet.'

'She took French leave,' Sophie explained, 'and went to the races with Brendan!'

Aunt Min looked at my downcast face, and met Sophie's eyes, and said, 'Ah well, least said, soonest mended, I've no doubt!'—and Sophie and I, catching each other's glance, both laughed, and the tension between us was broken; for this was

so familiar, Aunt Min and her homilies, right back from the beginning in the little house in Hackney.

'Shall I get you some tea?' asked Aunt Min.

'Oh, *please*!' we both said together and laughed again.

Sophie put her arm round my shoulder, and said, 'Take Rose up to her room, Aunt Min, and send the tea into my boudoir. When you've tidied up, Rose, you come down and have a nice cup of tea and a talk.' She gave my shoulders a little squeeze. 'I hope you like the room. I've tried to make it a real rose garden for my little Rose.'

I followed Aunt Min up to the second floor. The house, like everything that belonged to Sophie, was in good taste, but a little theatrical. There was white and gold paint everywhere, and in the hall and reception-room and on the stairs the carpets were a soft old-rose colour. The lights were all electric. I had never seen a house lit with electricity before, except for my brief glimpse of Drovny Street. At school we had oil lamps. The light shades were pink silk and crystal, and downstairs they were all gilt cupids holding the little pink lights in fat golden hands.

I gasped as I looked round my room. I had never seen anything like it. It was all white and gold paint with little chairs covered with pink and green brocade, and a satin eider quilt of pale green. There were cupboards for my clothes, and a few of the new ones already hung there, and mirrors with lights over them, and all the toilet china on the washstand was painted with roses, and pink and white roses climbed up a trellis all over the walls. The whole room was like being in a bower of roses. The window looked out over a pleasant garden to the mews at the back.

Aunt Min was watching me, and when she saw my face she said tersely, 'This ain't nothing, ducks. You wait till you see her ladyship's little lot!'

'But Aunt Min, it must have cost a fortune!'

Aunt Min shrugged, and her old face closed up, and her dry old voice said, 'It's not costing *her* a fortune, Rosie. Let them that can afford to pay for their fancies pay for 'em, says I. Ah

well, what you don't see you don't grieve for. You'd better get washed, and get down to your tea. It's not bread and scrape like it used to be in the old days at Hackney, I can tell you.'

I washed my hot face and tidied my hair. The sun on the Downs had caught my skin. My dress was a little crumpled from the long day, but I did not stop to change it, and went down to the first floor.

Here there was a bathroom and a dressing-room, and Sophie's bedroom and boudoir, both of which were large and looked out over the quiet square. The boudoir was like a padded satiny treasure-box, and Sophie was the treasure inside. It was all white and blue, with pretty inlaid furniture of golden rose-wood, and lamps of cut glass, and trinkets of silver; and the bedroom through the communicating door was the same, the big white bed all lace and frills, the dressing-table full of cut glass and ivory. There were vases full of white lilac and long-stemmed roses, filling the air with their perfume, and in each room, in front of the hearth, there was a rug of fluffy white bearskin.

Sophie was wrapped in a Japanese kimono covered with embroidered flowers, and her lovely hair loose about her shoulders. She tucked herself into a chaise-longue and told me to sit by her feet. A uniformed maid brought in a silver tray with tea and set it on a low table beside us. A small striped tabby-cat came in with her and leapt into Sophie's lap, and she stroked it, smiling, before she poured the tea.

'Woodbourne wanted to buy me a pedigree dog,' she said, 'but I didn't want a dog. They need looking after, I said, and I've enough to look after with Rose and myself.' She looked at me, amused and a little mocking, stroking the silver tabby. 'No, I says, I'll have an alley-cat to remind me that I'm an alley-cat myself, and won't get above myself, as Aunt Min says.'

'Are you going to marry him?' I said stiffly.

'Drink up your tea, Rosie, and don't be silly,' she said sharply.

We both drank our tea, and she said bluntly: 'Well, have

some sense. We're both married.'

I said awkwardly, 'Do you love him very much?'

It was silly, and I knew it, but I felt in a blundering, romantic way, that at least if she had a great passion for this man, I could understand. She looked at me over the gilt rim of her cup, and laughed, and said, 'Woodbourne? No fear!'

She put down her cup, and said, 'Love is for people who can afford it, Rose. I can't. Woodbourne's rich, and he's crazy over me, and he's pleasant enough. So don't look at me like that, young Rose. I've sheltered you. You don't know anything about the world yet, and you're not going to learn about it the way I did.'

I did not answer, but sat there, staring at the carpet, loving her and hating her. She swung her little feet in their golden mules to the floor, turning the cat off her lap, and stood up, standing over me; and although she was a little smaller than I, she seemed to tower over me, and her eyes blazed with blue fire.

'You remember that night when we had to get out quick, because our dad beat you up, Rose? When we sent to the Wellington to meet Dan? You remember those girls there in the bar—do you know what they were?'

'Well . . . I . . .' I faltered.

'They were tarts, Rose. Prostitutes. Women who sell themselves to be able to live. Well, I wasn't going down that way. Nor was I going into a shop to get varicose veins or serve drink in a bar-room, or be a servant to be thrown on the scrap-heap when I got old. I reckoned if I was for sale, I was worth a decent price, and I got it. Dan wanted me, and he got me, and I don't reckon I owe him anything.'

'I thought you were a singer. Couldn't you have made enough for us that way? I could have done without all the things you have given me. I'd rather have worked, or something, and been with you these years, than this.'

'Ah, Rosie, my little love!' She put her arms round me, and held me against her. 'You're such a baby. What d'you know? A *singer*? That's a good laugh, that is!' Her voice was scorn-

ful, 'singing round the pubs and the cheap halls for a few quid. I'd no talent. All I had was a pretty face, and guts, and I did what all women do—yes, Rose, even the ladies, the so-called good women. Lady Woodbourne with her long face—d'you think she ever wanted to marry Woody? She married him because, like all women in this world, she had to get a man to keep her! She's no better than me. At least I give him a good time, a laugh—and a bit of love!'

I was still silent, my face hidden against her silken, perfumed breast, struggling with the lump in my throat and the rising tears, hating everything she said, yet loving her so much.

'I made all the mistakes,' she said passionately. 'I learned pretty young that men set one standard for themselves and another for women. Well, we'll make no mistakes with you, Rose. We'll plan every step of the way, you're not going to have to use people like Dan Brady for stepping-stones on the way up, like I did. You'll step right up among the nobs, right up among the best from the start.'

'But,' I burst out, 'Dan loved you so! He was rough, but he was kind, and generous to both of us, and he was your husband!'

'He was paid for everything in full,' she said bitterly. 'I ought never to have married him. He thought he owned me. No one owns me but myself. Me, Sophia Eves—I belong to no one. Dan was not strong enough nor rich enough to hold me, and I got sick of him and his scenes and his drunken jealousy. He even had his men following me in the end. I've moved on, Rose, and up.'

Her hand was gentle on my hair, giving me mother-comfort automatically, in spite of the harsh bravado of her words.

'But you were *married* to him,' I repeated.

'That was his idea, not mine. I'll never see him again. I'm forgetting the Bradys.'

I raised my head, and said, 'And Brendan too?'—and the gentle hands on my hair were still, then fastened on my head, and turned it up so that she could look into my tear-stained face.

'Why—are you in love with him?'

I shook my head miserably, hating myself for being so stupid, crying like a fool, like the sort of girl I despised, but I couldn't help it. It was automatic, making me feel better while I felt awful.

'I don't know,' I wept. 'I hardly know him. How can I? Just that little while at Drovny Street when I was fourteen, and lately, just a few times. I like him terribly. When he touches me my knees go weak and my heart beats, but how do I know if that is love? You thought it was love once, didn't you—with André—and you were wrong.'

'Who told you about that?' Her face was white and hard. She let go my head, and turned away, moving about the room with swift, short, nervous steps. 'Aunt Min?'

I nodded, and she said:

'She shouldn't have! Or perhaps she should. To make you understand what fools girls are. Make you understand how men can betray you!' She turned on me quickly with a swift savagery. 'Has Brendan made love to you? Ever? Tell me that.'

'He kissed me once,' I said defiantly. 'What's wrong with that?'

She took a step towards me and her little jewelled hand was raised as if she would strike me, then she turned away, her face working, moved by an emotion I did not understand.

Then she turned, and hugged me, and put her face against mine. 'Promise me not to see him again, Rose.'

'Why?' I said protestingly.

'Do you want to make a fool of yourself like I did?'

'Brendan's not like that!' I said sullenly.

'All men are like that when a girl is pretty and a fool. All right, I'll put it like this, young Rose. All your life you've been on the receiving end. I've been giving. I've put up with a lot of things to look after you. A lot of sisters might not have. I know women who would have gone off and left you to stew with Father down in Hackney.' I shivered, and she said triumphantly, 'Aye—you don't like to think of that, do you? All

right. I've not asked for much, but I'm asking this of you now. You're only a nipper. Don't see Brendan alone. Not without my knowledge—not without me saying it's all right.'

I promised reluctantly, knowing in a way she was right when I remembered how helpless I had been beneath his kiss. And because what she said was true, she had looked after me since I was a baby and asked so little in return. She was all my family, my sister whom I loved.

'You're going to fly higher than any Brady. You're going to be a lady in her own house. A titled lady, Rosie, and people won't look through you like they do me. They'll honour you. That's why I sent you to school. That's why I'm sending you to the Frivolity. All right, maybe Brendan was right, and it is an auction block. But men won't buy second-hand goods. That's how this world is today, and you and I aren't going to alter it. Nothing can alter it unless the world blows up, or women become as important as men!'

She had tears in her eyes too, and yet they were not sad tears. Tears of anger, perhaps, or frustration. She reminded me, ridiculously, of Marjorie's old Aunt Flora—they were as unlike as any two women could be, and yet they were both creatures caged by the restrictions of their age.

She smiled, and touched my face. It must have looked very woebegone, her eyes were so tender.

'Poor little Rose. I know what you feel, but you're not feeling it alone, or with only a drunken father and a fool of a lady mother to turn to, as I did. You've got me, and we've got money now. You wait a while. A month in London, two months at the Frivolity, and you'll think very differently. You'll find it's not such a bad old world for a girl who knows what's what. Now, you run to Aunt Min, eh, while I get dressed. Next week, when we've got everything in hand, I'll take you out with me.'

I did not go down to Aunt Min, but back to my rose-strewn bower, and sat alone for a while and cried. I was crying for my helplessness, my youth and my fear that I should never see Brendan again.

At seven-thirty Aunt Min called me down to dinner, which was laid for us in the big semi-basement kitchen and served by the smart maid who had waited on Sophie and me upstairs. Aunt Min did all the cooking, and besides Smithers there was a scrubwoman who came in daily, and a washer-woman who collected the washing once or twice a week, and there was Jakes, Sophie's coachman, and Jakes's young son who lived with him in the rooms above the stables in the mews and was a mixture of groom and houseboy, cleaning shoes and windows, running errands, helping with the horses. Five people to wait on and look after the two of us.

Normally I would have loved eating in the kitchen with Aunt Min, and her food was always wonderful after the awful school food of the past four years. The fire in the big black and steel range was damped down, because the evening was warm, but there is always a cosiness about a kitchen. Red-tiled floors and rag rugs, and the great big dresser with the pretty china. Smithers was upstairs, helping Sophie to dress.

Aunt Min looked at me as I picked at the good food she had prepared, and said, 'I see she's told you?' And when I nodded, she shook her head, and said, 'Your poor ma would have cried her eyes out with the disgrace, but what you can't help you must put up with, I always says!'

She opened a bottle of good Burgundy and poured out two glasses, holding it up to the light as appreciatively as any clubman.

'Good drop of wine this is. Drink it up. It'll put heart into you. Sophie's got more sense and guts in her little finger than your poor ma had in her whole body. I never thought I'd be set up like this in my old age, and if your ma's life in Hackney was being respectable, and this little lot 'ere in Bayswater is disgrace, well, give me disgrace every time!'

She set her glass down, and said, 'But you don't need to worry about it, young Rose. She's got high old ideas for you. You be a good girl, and mind what Sophie says, and she'll have you among the nobs with a coronet on your blessed 'ead!'

I had to laugh. The tears had relieved my tension, and I was

young and healthy, and found I was hungry after all.

At eight, Woodbourne called for Sophie in his new toy, an electric brougham, a shining purring carriage looking a bit queer without any horses.

'Not natural,' said Aunt Min, shaking her head, her old apple cheeks flushed with Burgundy. We stood behind the kitchen curtains watching Sophie go out, resplendent in black velvet and diamonds, with a little 'restaurant bonnet' of ospreys and tulle set upon her pretty hair.

I went upstairs and had a real look at my room. Among the pretty convenient furniture there was a little white and gilt escritoire with a pen, and ink in a crystal inkstand, and notepaper. I sat down and wrote two letters.

One was to Marjorie. I didn't tell her everything, but I told her where we were living now, and also that I was starting at the Frivolity next Monday. I asked her to get in touch with me at the theatre, suggesting that perhaps we might meet. I wanted to know that she and Aunt Flora were still my friends, and that there was somewhere I could go if it became necessary. I did not know how or why it might become necessary, but I felt very strongly the need to be in touch with my one friend.

I wrote also to Brendan at Mr. Vestry's. I had promised Sophie I would not see him again without her permission, but I had not said I would not write. I did not arrange to meet him, or ask him to see me or anything like that. I was not even sure whether he wanted to see me, or how much that one kiss had meant to him. But I did say that I hoped he would not lose his job because of me. I said I was sorry our lovely day had ended so badly, and it was all my fault. I said I hoped he would not go to Australia without seeing me. I thought all this trouble might have made him want to put the whole thing behind him, and go earlier than he had planned. I said I was sorry about Dan and Sophie but I was afraid it was too late to do anything and there was nothing I could do. I sent my regards to the Vestrys, and finished, 'Love from Rose.'

As inadequate a letter as an eighteen-year-old could pos-

sibly write. Like Tatania in *Eugene Onegin* I wanted to sit and pour out my heart. I wanted to tell him I was in love with him, that I desperately wanted to know if he loved me, that I was afraid that he loved my sister although for his brother's sake he hated her too, and that I was desperate that he would leave the country and go out of my life. But I could not say this. I nearly tore the letter up, and then hurriedly put it in an envelope and went downstairs.

To my astonishment I found Smithers and Aunt Min standing in the hall, Smithers trembling and apprehensive, and Aunt Min with a poker in her hand.

'What on earth's the matter?' I said.

'Oh, miss,' wailed Smithers, 'there's a fellow hanging about outside. I was cleaning the silver I was, and I looked up and there he was, a-staring through the kitchen window, looking horrible.'

Memories of Jack-the-Ripper shivered through my head.

'Did you see him, Aunt Min?'

'No, but all the doors are locked, and I reckon I can deal with him if he tries anything on.' Aunt Min's life in the East End had toughened her up, but Smithers was a country girl.

I put my letters in my handbag and went into the drawing-room, turning on the lights. It was a beautiful room, rich and warm in white and gold and rosy French brocades. I drew the heavy curtain of rose-coloured velvet a little aside, and looked out.

Down in the street I could see a man standing in the yellow circle of the lamplight. It was Dan Brady.

CHAPTER FIVE

I DROPPED the window curtain and started towards the front door. Smithers let out a shriek and implored me not to unlock it or we should all be murdered. Aunt Min put down her poker and said, 'Be careful, Rosie. Dan's not in his right mind, you know. He hasn't been, ever since she left him.'

But I was not frightened of Dan. I drew the bolts and ran down the steps, and he came out of the bushes at me with a revolver in his hand and murder in his eyes. I stopped quite still, and said, '*Dan!* Dan, don't you know *me*? It's Rose!'

His hand dropped to his side, and he turned away, covering his face with his hand, and I saw his shoulders were shaking. I ran up to him, torn with pity for him, and put my arm through his as he walked away into the darkness.

'Dan,' I said. 'Dan, please . . . please try not to be like this.'

He stopped, and looked at me, his handsome, haggard face trembling, his eyes wandering. He touched my hair and said, 'Rosie, I might have killed you. Your hair being the same colour as hers . . . and you grown now. I was waiting for them, her and that bastard that took her away from me. What did he want to do that for? He's rich. He could afford any woman. He's got a wife . . . why did he have to take Sophie from me?'

We were walking together through the lamp-lit streets, and I was clinging to his arm as though I was his daughter, pleading with him and trying to calm him.

'Dan, don't go on like this. It won't do any good. It'll only make you more unhappy if you harm her.' I did not mention Woodbourne's name. 'Dan, I understand how you feel. I wish she'd stay with you. But you know Sophie. She was what she is now before she ever met you, and nothing can change her once her heart is set on anything.'

'What do you know about such things?' he said. 'You're just a child.'

He walked on until we came to a main road. There was a public house on the corner of the street. He put his hand across his mouth, and said, 'Got to have a drink . . .' and plunged through the doorway into the saloon. I went with him.

I had never been in a public house before. This one was chiefly frequented by the groomsmen and coachmen of the district—rarely by women, because only rough women and prostitutes went into pubs. In my pale grey dress, my hair bound with a blue ribbon, I was very conspicuous, although there were only a few men there.

Dan got a double tot of whisky from the bar and came back to me. I might not have been there, for all he knew. I saw Sophie's coachman Jakes looking across from another bar, his face full of astonishment and concern. Dan put a hand on my arm, and I saw Jakes put his glass down and go out of the street door, and I knew he was coming round to us.

I wished I could help Dan—he seemed out of his mind, preoccupied with his loss and unaware of the world around him.

'Who's the man?' he asked looking at me. His eyes, once as blue, handsome and long-lashed as Brendan's, were sodden and bleary, and his big hands shook, spilling the whisky. 'It's not him, not that bastard Woodbourne, whatever he may think. That's what makes it so hard, Rosie—if she cared for him I'd not feel so bad. But she doesn't care for him. It's his money. His bloody money!' he shouted, and I patted his arm as though he was an animal I was trying to soothe, still conscious of the glances of the men about the bar.

'There's another man she dreams about. When a man holds a woman in his arms and she's thinking all the time of somebody else, it eats away at his vitals, Rosie. It leaves him empty of everything but hate. There's somebody else she dreams of. I've seen it in her eyes.'

'That was long ago, Dan, before she met you.'

'No!' he shouted, banging his fist on the table. The landlord

looked over warily. '*No!* I knew all about that. That little fancy French piano-player. It's somebody else. I knew before Woodbourne ever came. A man always knows, when a woman looks at him, seeing another man all the time. All those mashers crowding into Drovny Street! I used to watch them, wondering which one it was. I had her followed, and found out about that rich fool Woodbourne ...' He gave a harsh laugh. 'He's no better off than me. He pays—and he has her, when she wants to give herself, and all the time there's somebody else. Who is it?'

He looked at me with his sodden eyes blazing, and whispered hoarsely, 'It couldn't be the boy, could it? It couldn't be my boy Brendan, could it? He'd never have anything to do with her, as I could see ... and yet I've wondered.'

He covered his face again, and when he spoke, the words were torn from him in a terrible agony, as though each one caused him physical pain. 'I've no peace any more. So long as she stayed, it was all right. I gave her everything I could, Rose. I asked no questions—so long as she stayed. I'm a rough, common chap, I know. I've scrapped my way up, but I've given her everything I could, and she could have had my life if she wanted it.'

The wandering eyes steadied, and he said, 'I'll kill her and I'll kill Woodbourne, and then I'll have some peace.'

The door opened and Jakes entered. He came to my side, and said, 'Can I help you, Miss Eves?'

'This is Mr. Dan Brady, Jakes.'

'I know, miss,' he said, poker-faced. 'I was one of his lordship's drivers before I came to ... to Mrs. Dan. I've seen Mr. Brady at Drovny Street.'

'He's sick,' I insisted.

I saw the man's eyes flicker, and I knew he knew a lot more than he would say.

'This is no place for you, Miss Eves,' he said. 'Let me take you home.'

Dan had sat down on a bench, his face buried in his hands, oblivious to everyone and everything.

Jakes said reassuringly, 'I'll come back and see after him. Really, miss.'

I went out with Jakes and he walked back home with me. I ran in and got my bag. I had a half-sovereign in it, and I gave it to Jakes.

'See he gets a cab home,' I said. 'He's not in his right mind. He was very good to me when I was a child. I hate to see him like this.'

The man's expressionless, servant's face warmed. 'That's all right, Miss Eves,' he said. 'I'll just take the cabby's fare.'

He hesitated, coloured, then said:

'If you'll forgive me saying so, miss, you're a real kind young lady. Most people can't bother to look at a man when he's down, and it strikes me that Dan Brady is right on the floor. He's taken it real hard.'

I went back into the house and found Aunt Min and Smithers waiting in the hall. I told Smithers to go to bed, and went into the drawing-room.

Aunt Min followed me and asked, 'Was he waiting for her?'

'Yes.'

She shook her head, her wrinkled old face full of anxious foreboding. 'She'll get herself killed one day, that Sophie, the way she treats men. You mark my words.'

A few minutes later Jakes came into the hall and gave me my money back.

'He'd gone when I got back, miss. His old growler had come. You know, the old cabby that drives for him? Been looking for him all evening. Anyway he took him home.' He seemed to want to say more, but he only added: 'I'll keep a watch out when I'm driving Mrs. Dan in future.'

I thanked him, and he went out, just as the electric brougham returned bringing Sophie and Woodbourne back from supper.

They came in together exuding an atmosphere of opulent sensuality. Aunt Min took Woodbourne's crimson-lined opera cloak, his tall hat and silver-headed cane, and Sophie sailed into the drawing-room, turning on all the lights.

'Aunt Min,' she called, 'bring some champagne. A sandwich or something, Woody darling? No? Sure? Just champagne, and make sure it's cold, Min.'

She turned to me, sliding off her black taffeta mantle. It was embroidered with jet and lined with cream-coloured satin, and the sleeves were edged with waterfalls of rose-point lace. Her expression was questioning.

'And what was Jakes doing in the house at this hour, Rose?' she asked.

'He walked home with me.'

'Walked home with you!' she exploded. 'And where had you been at this hour?'

She took a cigar from a silver box, tried it in her fingers, smelled it, cut and pierced it and handed it to Woodbourne with a smile, waiting for my reply.

'I went out to Dan. Dan Brady. He came here to kill you and Lord Woodbourne. He was waiting about for you outside.'

Woodbourne looked up from lighting his cigar. The match burned his fingers, and he cursed, and threw it down. A long look passed between him and Sophie.

'What the devil was Jakes doing?' he stormed. 'Why didn't he call a constable and give the bounder in charge!'

'But—it was *Dan*!' I protested. 'He's still your husband, Sophie! He was always kind to me.'

'He's mad,' she said, then anxiously, 'but he might have hurt you, Rosie.'

I shook my head. 'No. Not Dan. He wouldn't hurt me. But he's so unhappy, Sophie. It's terrible to see how unhappy he is.'

She came over and kissed me, and today I can smell her perfume and see the lovely cleanliness of her golden hair and warm white skin. But over her shoulder in the mirror I could see her quick little glance to Woodbourne. Their eyes met, and he gave a little decisive nod. She smiled at me, warm and caressing. 'We'll talk about this tomorrow. But promise me you won't ever go out alone at night again, Rose.'

I was very tired, bewildered, wading through an emotional

quagmire which seemed to have no way out and no end. Everyone was telling me half-truths, everything seemed false behind this comfortable, luxurious, charming façade. I said woodenly, 'I always seem to be making you promises.'

I bade them goodnight and went towards the door. As I crossed the big room I saw them reflected in one of the gilt-framed mirrors. Woodbourne started to speak, but with a warning glance towards my retreating back, she put her fingers against his lips silencing him caressingly, and before I had gone through the door I saw him take her into his arms and cover her bare shoulders with kisses. Above his dark head I saw her lovely face, tense with controlled distaste.

I shut the door quickly, remembering that I had seen her look like that just after she married Dan. And I remembered what Brendan had said to me about living with a man you did not love. And what poor Dan had said tonight . . . 'Who is the man? It couldn't be my boy Brendan?'

I felt sick and cold. It was one of those moments again, of getting much older in a flash, of realising something as an adult and not as a young girl. To a woman who had set herself to live as Sophie had, a real love, an honest desire, would be like a revelation—and a woman like Sophie would not hesitate to take it if ever it could touch her frozen heart.

That was my first night in the rosy bower of a room, and it was possibly the first really unhappy night I had ever spent in my life, my mind full of thoughts I did not want to think and from which I was trying to run away.

I must have fallen asleep, for when I rose and looked out of the window and saw the electric brougham still outside, it was three o'clock. Presently I heard Woodbourne's deep drawling voice on the stairs and Sophie's pretty laugh.

It was late when I woke next morning—about ten. Aunt Min brought me some tea and toast, and then I remembered I had not posted my letters. I dressed quickly, putting on a skirt and a white blouse, hurriedly tying my hair back with a ribbon as I had done at school, and started down the stairs on tip-toe, the letters in my hand.

The door of Sophie's boudoir stood open, and as I attempted to creep past she called my name.

I stopped and went in reluctantly. She was seated at her rosewood escritoire wearing a peignoir of rose-coloured chiffon and Valenciennes lace, her hair rolled up in glorious untidiness on top of her head, skewered with a big pearl pin. A tray with coffee stood on a small table, and at the open window the little tabby-cat, Muffin, slept in the sunshine. The desk was covered with bills, and cheques made out in what I supposed was Woodbourne's handwriting, for it certainly was not Sophie's. She was putting the cheques and bills into envelopes and addressing and stamping them.

She glanced at me, and noticed the letters in my hand. She met my eyes with a little smile. I stood there silently, feeling that she knew quite well that one of my letters was addressed to Brendan, but all she said was, 'Are you going to the post? Good, you can wait for my letters.'

I sat down in one of the little brocade-covered chairs until she finished. Then she turned to face me, and, smiling gravely but determinedly, held out her hand for my two letters.

I flushed and handed them to her, and she glanced at the addresses. Marjorie's she handed straight back to me, but she kept the one addressed to Brendan, balancing it between her finger-tips.

'I thought you promised not to see him again?'

'I didn't promise not to write to him,' I protested sullenly.

She said gently, 'I won't open it if you'll tell me why you're writing to him.'

I shrugged, affecting indifference, my heart pounding.

'I only wrote to say I was sorry if he lost his job, through my fault, and that if he was going to Australia . . .'

'Australia?' she said, startled, and her colour changed. 'Australia? Brendan is going to Australia? When?'

'I don't know. He's been talking of it for some time.'

'Why?'

'He says it's a big new country where this land-and-gentleman nonsense doesn't matter any more. He says it's what a

man is, there, not who his father was and where he went to school.'

'Yes,' she said, and her eyes lit up. 'Yes. I understand that. What will he do there?'

'Train race-horses. Mr. Vestry would give him introductions.'

'I see.'

'He's been saving to go,' I said. 'But I thought if Mr. Vestry did not keep him, after what Lord Woodbourne said, he might go right away, perhaps work his passage.'

Her eyes were preoccupied, her fingers automatically putting her envelopes into little piles, shifting and shuffling them like a pack of cards. She said suddenly, 'Does he ever speak to you of me, Rose?'

'No,' I said slowly. 'Only when I've asked him . . . and then reluctantly.'

'And what then?'

'Are you in love with him?' I blurted out.

Her face flamed and her eyes flashed. 'With that penniless boy?' she snapped. 'Am I a fool?'

'He says you are a real man's woman,' I said slowly. 'And he says people don't like you, they either love or hate you.'

She let out a long, soft sigh, as if I had told her something that had puzzled her but which she had longed to know.

'Where,' she said, in the gay, mocking voice that was so familiar, 'does a real man's woman find a real man these days?

'Don't worry about Brendan, young Rose—I'll have a word with Woody, and he'll put everything all right. He knows Brendan is good with the horses. He just ought to keep a civil tongue in his head, that's all. Don't you trouble your little head about it.'

She tore my letter into several pieces and dropped them into the wastepaper basket.

'When you've come back from the post, dear, go and get dressed. The pink dress with the pleats, I think. And put on a hat, because I want to take you to Oxford Street to order something for Ascot—I don't see why you shouldn't come this

year. Tell Aunt Min to tell Jakes to bring the carriage round at eleven, will you?'

She handed me the pile of envelopes and rose to her feet, stretching like a cat so that the lace and chiffon sleeves fell back, exposing her lovely white arms. There was something exultant about her. Something triumphant.

'Hurry, ducks!' she cried, and went through to the bedroom.

As I went on downstairs, I heard her strong tuneful voice singing the waltz song from the show she had seen the night before.

The street looked leafy and charming in the morning sunlight, and children were setting off with their nursemaids to the Park. The post box was only a few yards away, and as I went I riffled through the letters: my one letter to Marjorie, and the others addressed, in Sophie's big strong hand, to stores and shops, dressmakers, milliners, shoemakers, wine-merchants. And one to the Commissioner of Police. I stared at it in astonishment, then put it into the box with the others, dismissing it from my mind, and walked back to the house.

The following Monday I started at the Frivolity. I realised that my idea I had had of the money I was going to earn there being any use to us, was laughable. For one thing, Sophie would not hear of my going to the theatre by omnibus or tube and if the carriage was not available then I had a hansom cab, so that my cab bills alone took a great part of my week's salary.

If I had any idea that the life of a Frivolity girl was all champagne and diamonds, it was quickly dismissed from my mind. Outside, it could be like this, but inside the theatre Deward was a strict disciplinarian, and if any member of the cast was late for either a rehearsal or a performance she was fined.

The girls came from all sorts of homes. Some of them were the mistresses of wealthy men, others came with their mothers, and mothers or fathers waited for them and took them home

after the show. One or two were young married women. Others were tough girls from working-class homes, well able to look after themselves. But one and all were ravishingly pretty, and one and all were constantly pursued by the young men-about-town. And not just the smart, rich young men. Clerks, and shop assistants, errand-boys and waiters—all sorts. They bought picture postcards of their favourites, and many would wait outside the stage door just for a word or a smile. In an odd way it made you feel like royalty, and in spite of everything, I could not help enjoying it.

The work, certainly, was not difficult. Deward used pretty girls to fill in his stage as an artist uses colours. We sang, we changed our clothes five times during the performance, we grouped and regrouped ourselves behind the principals, occasionally we spoke a few words, alone, or in a group, like an exceedingly frivolous and slightly mad Greek chorus.

Leading up to a song, one of the principals would say, 'I say, girls—the Honourable Bertie is in love.' And we would all trip across to the comedian who played the Honourable Bertie, and pose round him, twittering together, 'Betty, dahling—do *tell* us *all* about it!' Then he would say, 'Gather round, girls—last night at the Ball I met a Girl in Little Blue Shoes . . .' Which was the cue for his song, and he would put his arms round the girls on either side of him, and sing his number called 'Darling Little Blue Shoes with your Blue, Blue Eyes' —and of course there was a backcloth depicting blue seas and blue morning glory climbing over a golden trellis, and we were all dressed in pretty blue dresses and hats. The story was a love story, all about a Ruritanian Princess and an American Millionaire. It was all quite silly, but I never ceased to be amazed at the talent of the principals, how out of this nonsense they could invent so much that was tender, or charming or uproariously funny.

I came into a show already made, filling another girl's place, so I did not see the show built up from the start or hear the principals working up their lines, their gags, their dramatic points but even so—it was illuminating. Almost every day,

something was worked in from the day's events to get a topical laugh. It was hard work. Always two rehearsals a week, a show every night from eight-thirty to eleven and a matinee once a week on Saturday.

The afternoon and the early evening were our playtimes, and late-night suppers after the show. Then we ruled our small, glamorous, artificial world. Then we were Frivolity Girls, the pretty toasts of the town, fêted by everyone, desired by all men, who seeing us always pretty, smiling, beautifully dressed, wove dreams about us, as men always have about the unattainable. I had my following from the start; my picture postcards sold well, and the orchids and the roses, the chocolates and the gloves, the fans and the scent, began to come my way. A few diamonds too, which I always sent back.

Apathetically, not really interested, longing only to see Brendan again, I allowed Sophie to direct my Frivolity career. I was known to be 'a good girl' and not a 'high-stepper'. I was always accompanied and chaperoned to and from the theatre. Poor old Aunt Min, nodding away in the carriage, or dozing away in the dressing-room over a glass of stout, must have found it a trial. I was never allowed to accept invitations for late suppers after the show, when the carriages gathered and the high-steppers were whisked off to Romanos or Frascatis. I had to go home unless Sophie took me out with her, and then we were always accompanied by Lord Woodbourne and Hugh Travers.

My time was the day-time, when Sophie took me to luncheon and river parties, race meetings and polo games, in fact to all the day-time fashionable occasions. I drove in the Park with Sophie like any débutante with her Mama, though of course I was very much better dressed than the average débutante, and I certainly had more young men buzzing round me when our carriage stopped by the railings. I was, as it were, a débutante on the wrong side of the blanket, and Sophie exulted over the cold or jealous stares of the respectable society girls when we drove in the Park, or when I rode with Hugh in the Row.

It didn't delight me so much. I would have welcomed a few friends of my own age, and the girls at the theatre were all preoccupied with their careers or their men. I roused a great deal of speculation, of course. I never knew quite how many 'propositions' I had, because Sophie opened the mashers' letters, laughed and threw them away. Apart from the great society balls and receptions and court presentations, my life was not a great deal different from the regular society débutante's life. I knew I was causing a flutter in the dovecotes, and it amused me, and I learned from the girls in the theatre that bets were being laid as to whether my engagement to Hugh would be announced. I told them I had no intention of being engaged to anyone, but it did not stop the rumours.

The first week I was at the Frivolity I had a note from Marjorie in answer to mine, asking me round to Bloomsbury to tea. I got Sophie's permission, and Jakes drove me over to their flat. When I rang the bell I could hear a tapping noise inside, and Marjorie called out for me to come in.

There she was, in their big bare drawing-room full of files and papers, and banners painted with 'Votes for Women', stiff uncomfortable furniture and rows and rows of bookshelves, working away at one of those new-fangled typewriting machines, her spectacles balanced on her little freckled nose and her red hair bundled up on top of her head.

She jumped up and kissed me, and we hugged, and were delighted to see each other. Marjorie wore a tailored skirt and a high-necked cotton blouse, and a watch tucked into her waistbelt. I was acutely conscious of my rose-pink muslin and the white straw hat trimmed with one huge pale pink rose which perched on top of my piled-up hair. Everything about me, white gloves, patent leather shoes, silk stockings, parasol, handbag, lace handkerchief, was perfect, a combination of Sophie's taste and George Deward's discipline, and, of course, Lord Woodbourne's money.

Aunt Flora came in with her wild white hair and kind smile, and said, 'Bless the child, she looks like a rose and smells like

one. We forget about prettiness and daintiness here.'

She did not say it as if she meant that they could not be bothered with it, but just that they had far more important things to do.

'We've made this a district headquarters,' explained Marjorie. 'Sit down, Rose, if you can find a chair, and I'll get some tea.'

I moved a pile of papers and a pot of glue from a chair and sat down, and presently Marjorie brought in a tray with tea and a large slab of cake. I thought of the exquisite meals I ate, and of the three women, Aunt Min, Smithers and the laundress, who worked so hard to send me out, as Aunt Flora said, looking like a rose, and I looked at Aunt Flora's ink-stained fingers, and tired, intelligent, kindly face—and for the first time in my life I felt like a useless parasite.

Aunt Flora lit a cigarette from a packet. She was the first woman I ever saw who smoked like a man. Sophie smoked, but it was a sort of provocative gesture, drawing out her little onyx-and-diamond holder, the little onyx-and-diamond case containing six Russian cigarettes, gold-tipped, multicoloured. It was pretty to see her turn back her gloves and light one after dinner in an expensive restaurant, glancing round under her big hat, her eyes alight with mischief as she watched the shocked faces of the other women watching her. But Aunt Flora's ink-stained fingers were stained also with nicotine, and there was nothing provocative about her. A tall, elderly, thin, plain, clever, kindly woman, she lived only to work for the under-dog; and in her opinion, women were the under-dogs of her generation.

Marjorie poured out the tea. I was conscious that they were stopping their work only out of politeness to me and that the minute I went the feverish preparing of pamphlets, speeches and meetings would start again. While I was there the telephone rang incessantly, and there were cryptic messages with the use of code numbers. All sorts of people called, including a few men and some messenger-boys, but for the most part they were earnest, clever-looking and not very well dressed women

of all ages, classes and types. They would open the door and put their heads in, look at me askance, and say, 'Sorry, F.M.' (or 'M.M.' if they wanted Marjorie), 'I'll look in later.'

But the minute we started tea, Aunt Flora said through a cloud of cigarette smoke, 'Marjorie showed me your letter, Rose. How can we help you?'

I looked at her, and coloured, and said, 'You'll be shocked.'

'I don't think so,' said Aunt Flora gently.

'My sister Sophie,' I began, stumbling, and Aunt Flora finished the sentence for me:

'Your sister Sophie has accepted the protection of Lord Woodbourne.'

I looked up in surprise, and she laughed, and said, 'I have to read all the newspapers. I'm not too high-minded to miss the society scandal.'

Marjorie said indignantly, 'I think you should leave her right away.' She rose to her feet. 'The position is both immoral and undignified.'

Aunt Flora said indulgently, 'Sit down, dear. You're not on the platform now, M.M. It's not as easy as all that, is it, Rose?'

'No,' I said. I swallowed, and looked straight at Aunt Flora. 'I love her very much. She may be doing wrong, but nevertheless she has looked after me since my mother died. It was hard for her. She's been father, mother, everything. She's only very young now, she's only twenty-six. I know her sort of life is everything you're fighting against, Marjorie, but she has fought too. I couldn't just hurt her, or leave her—I owe her too much—but——'

I stopped again, and again Aunt Flora finished for me. She was the most understanding woman I have ever met. She said in the same quiet, gentle voice, 'But you would like to feel you had somewhere to go, and some friends to turn to if you needed it.'

It was exactly what I wanted, and my eyes filled with grateful tears.

Marjorie said at once, 'Of course you can come here and

live with us absolutely any time you want to, can't she, F.M.?'

'She can indeed. We may not be able to give you the comfort and luxury you are accustomed to, Rose, but you are always welcome here. Remember that—at any hour, anytime, if you want to come, you come.'

'Thank you.'

She rose, and kissed me kindly, saying, 'Now you must forgive me, I have a meeting tonight, and I have not quite prepared my speech. Marjorie, there's no need for you to work so hard, why don't you two girls go out on this lovely day?'

'Come for a drive, Marjorie,' I said eagerly. 'Jakes has the carriage outside——'

I stopped, looking at Aunt Flora, realising that she might easily object to Marjorie riding in Sophie's carriage; but she smiled, and shook her head, and said what a good idea that was, and went off to her study.

Marjorie went to get her hat and I wandered about the bare, untidy room, reading pamphlets and posters and finally picking up that morning's newspaper.

A familiar name caught my eye.

'Daniel Brady, 39, of 13 Drovny Street, W.1, was charged today with running an illegal gambling-house. Brady, who pleaded guilty, was sentenced to six months.'

I felt cold and sick. If the article meant what I thought it meant, it was horrible. It meant that Sophie had informed on Dan—deliberately, to have him out of her way.

I remembered the letter I had posted, addressed to the Commissioner of Police in Sophie's strong, bold handwriting. Surely she could not have done a thing like this. Dan had been so generous to us. She and I had lived on what he earned from the gambling-house in Drovny Street, and Dan had been running it without any interference all the years I had been at school. Now, suddenly, the police had taken action.

I read on, fearfully—and reluctantly, too, for if this were true I would rather not have known about it.

Information had been laid with the police by an anonymous informer. There were a few acid remarks from the judge to the

police witnesses, and reading between the lines one gathered that it had been a well-conducted place and that the men of the beat had been 'well-looked after' but had been forced to take action when information had been laid.

Sophie and Woodbourne were safe from Dan's jealousy for the next half-year at least.

I must have gone very pale, for when Marjorie came in, with a straw boater set on her red hair, busily buttoning her gloves, she looked startled, and exclaimed, 'What's up, old girl? Sit down. You look as though you've seen a ghost.'

'I'm all right. It's nothing.' I picked up the newspaper and said, 'May I take this? There's something in it about a friend of Sophie's that I'd like to show her.'

I still felt sick from shock, but now I was angry too. I had wanted to see Marjorie again, but my enjoyment of the day was spoiled. We bowled round Regent's Park, and then got down and walked by the lake, Marjorie talking away as usual. But I was silent, hardly listening, just catching the drift of her words. My mind was filled with the thought of the newspaper lying on the seat of the carriage, and the more horrible thought of Dan in prison. Rough, kind, generous Dan. Perhaps because my sister had put him there. My sister and his wife. All the sunshine had gone out of the day. All the pleasure of meeting Marjorie again.

Marjorie did not seem to notice my change of mood. She was full of talk about 'the necessity of becoming militant' and about someone called Arthur, who was a Liberal and just down from Cambridge. He was, it seemed, one of the very few men who were 'heart and soul with the Women's Cause'. Being more sophisticated, if less intellectual, than Marjorie, I soon realised that her interest in this Arthur was not just due to his opinions, and had I felt less depressed I would have teased her about him.

I dropped her at the flat, and Jakes drove me home.

Sophie arrived a moment later. She had been out to Hampton Court to lunch at George Deward's riverside house with a party of theatrical people, and came rustling in, peeling off her

gloves, calling for Smithers to take her hat and parasol and unhook her, so that she could put on a wrap and rest before she dressed for the evening.

I followed her into her bedroom, and put the newspaper down on the dressing-table before her. She read through the article, taking off her rings and bracelets and unpinning her mass of waving, corn-coloured hair.

'Poor old Dan,' she said indifferently. 'Well, he always knew it was a risk running that place.'

'You didn't inform on him, did you, Sophie?'

She met my eyes in the mirror, her pretty face calm and expressionless.

'Why should you think that?'

'I posted a letter to the Commissioner of Police. Among the letters I posted for you last week.'

'Quite the little detective, aren't we?' The blue eyes looked directly into mine. 'Why on earth should you imagine I would do such a thing? That was a letter I addressed for Lord Woodbourne, about a servant of his that was in some sort of trouble.' She turned back to her mirror. Smithers had unhooked the long corsets, made of white satin and lace and boned to a twenty-two inch waist, and helped her into her embroidered kimono. She leant back in her chair, handing Smithers the brushes to brush her hair. She took a cigarette out of her little case, and lit it, half-closing her eyes, sensually, like a kitten blinking in the sunshine under the long soft strokes.

'All the same,' she said, 'I'm not pretending I'm sorry, Rose. I'll sleep easier, and I'm sure everyone in the house will too, now we know that madman isn't waiting about outside crazy with jealousy.'

I did not remind her that the madman was her husband, or that if he was mad, the fault was hers. I knew it was no use. I went slowly up to my room, and the rosy bower closed in on me like a prison. I knew that she had lied to me. That bare, undusted, untidy, uncomfortable room where Aunt Flora and

Marjorie lived and worked seemed, compared to our life here, as clean and sweet and pure as a strand washed by the sea.

The great event in our life now was the Ascot meeting. I don't know whether Sophie guessed why I was so amenable about going, but I expect she did. It was the first race-meeting we had attended since the Derby, and I was hoping that in spite of everything, I might see Brendan there.

I had not heard a word from him or about him, and I did not even know whether he was still with Mr. Vestry or not. If he was still at Vestry's stables, he would certainly be with the horses. The Grayling was running in the Gold Cup, in which they hoped he would repair his failure at Epsom, and there was another horse of Lord Woodbourne's, Cornucopia, a recent purchase, being tried out on the last day.

Because of the evening performance at the Frivolity I could not stay at Ascot, so we travelled down by train each day from Waterloo, and a carriage met us and took us to the course, where Lord Woodbourne had taken a box for every day of the meeting. He also reserved a first-class carriage to take all his guests down, as they were nearly all theatre people, sporting men and fashionable young men-about-town. Although he and Huge both had invitations to the Royal Enclosure, the invitations did not, of course, include his guests, or at any rate not his feminine guests; for while many of the men in our party were rich and aristocratic, all the ladies were exclusively from the theatre, or from that smart demi-monde on the fringe of society which depended on the heavy spending of very wealthy men. It was all to be very gay, and Sophie and I had a new dress for every day, in spite of my protests that I already had plenty of clothes. Sophie spent time, money and her delightful taste on equipping me, with the absorbed care of an experienced investor buying shares on the Stock Exchange.

If it had not been my one chance of seeing Brendan I would not have gone. I did not care for the company, and I hated the fact that everything we had, from the lobster and champagne at lunch, to our clothes, was paid for by Lord Woodbourne. I

hated the talk, the risqué stories and the scandal. I could be a man's woman, as Brendan had said, in some respects, in the talk about horses, handling of horses and the training of them —but the rest, the chatter of food and gambling and scandal, bored and often disgusted me. I knew that among this crowd, but for Sophie's strict surveillance, I should have been pestered by the admiration and advances of many of the men. I was known among them as 'my Lady Prig' or sometimes 'the Beautiful Icicle', but so long as they left me alone, I did not care.

I think both Woodbourne and Sophie felt a sort of triumph at flaunting their relationship in the face of society. Although he was a selfish, sensual man, he was deeply infatuated with her and more proud of her beauty than of all his expensive possessions. Society turned a cold shoulder, and whispered, closing its ranks like a threatened herd, and the more they did so, the more reckless Woodbourne became. There was no doubt that Sophie was the most beautiful woman there during the three days' racing. She would sit in the front of the box, surrounded by admirers, laughing and whispering with Woodbourne, exquisitely dressed, holding up her binoculars to watch the racing, and between races gazing down on the fashionable crowd below as though they were a bowl full of exceedingly boring goldfish.

For the first two days I had no chance at all of seeing Brendan. He did not bring the horses to the paddock, and we did not go to the saddling enclosure, Woodbourne feeling the chatter of the butterfly horde of girls might excite or frighten the horses. Besides, we had come for lunching, and flirting, and gossiping, and champagne and strawberries, not really for racing.

On Gold Cup day I scanned the crowd with my binoculars, hoping for even a glimpse of those broad shoulders and that swaggering tilt of the head, and once or twice Sophie caught my eye, and smiled to herself, as though she knew very well whom I was looking for. It was absolutely impossible for me to slip away. I saw Mr. Vestry, very busy and occupied with The

Grayling, and Mrs. Vestry, very splendid and enormous in her favourite bright-blue and even more enormous hat. We waved, and I was longing desperately to go to her and pour out questions about Brendan. To ask if he was still with them at Epsom, and if she would tell him how terribly sorry I was about poor Dan, and ask if he hated both Sophie and me and blamed all Dan's troubles on us. To ask if he had done anything yet about his passage to Australia—or if he had in fact already gone. And *if* he had not gone, to give him my love. And if he *had* gone, then to give me his address, because then I would have written to him—it would have been easy to put my heart down on paper to someone safely thousands of miles away, and neither Sophie nor anyone else would have stopped me.

But all this was just longing and dreams, because I was part of Lord Woodbourne's party, and if he and Sophie were beyond the pale of society, and the royal party swept past him without acknowledging his salute, at least we kept up an outward appearance of unity and gaiety. Lord Woodbourne spoke cordially to the Vestrys, but after the scene at Epsom on Derby Day I did not defy Sophie and flout his displeasure and bolt off in my chiffon and laces to the stable to ask after Brendan.

The Grayling won his race in style with a fine sprinting finish, and then I did hear Mr. Vestry telling Lord Woodbourne that a great deal of credit should go to young Brady for his work on the horse since Epsom, and hope flooded back into my heart. At least he was still in England, and still at Epsom. But Mr. Vestry received Lord Woodbourne's congratulations and departed, and my only hope then was for the last day, Friday, when the other horse, Cornucopia, was running.

The day The Grayling won there was jubilation in Lord Woodbourne's party, and a dinner party was arranged for the evening when we got back to town. I would not attend, because I had to go to the theatre. The evening after a big fashionable race-meeting was always pandemonium at the Frivolity, because so many of the girls played truant, risking

the fine. Very often the poor stage manager made the rounds of the smart restaurants in a hansom cab, rounding up his beauties like a faithful sheepdog in pursuit of a flock of ravishingly pretty sheep.

The dinner party was to be held at our house in Bayswater. A great deal of ordering and messenger-sending went on, and before seven the place was invaded with hired waiters and chefs from one of the big hotels and florists were decorating the round table with smylax and ropes of blossom in the Woodbourne racing colours.

I had a tray in my room, and left for the theatre with Aunt Min just before the guests arrived. As I came down, having changed my dress for a simple evening-dress, Sophie was in the hall, supervising everything. It was the first time she had given a large party. I watched her for a moment from the shadow of the landing. She had already changed into an orchid-coloured dress, from which her lovely shoulders and bosom rose like a flower from within a flower. There were diamonds in her hair, and small diamond stars catching the chiffons round her bare shoulders, and diamonds on her wrists and fingers.

She was wonderful at this sort of thing, capable and clever, and I thought what a wonderful woman she might have been, either married to a man she could love and respect, or in some other kind of world, running a business, forging some kind of career. But I could already see a change in her, though it was so subtle it was hard to pinpoint: a hardness and sensuality touching her glorious youth and beauty, an unhappiness about the lovely eyes.

She looked up and caught me looking at her, and as though she divined my thoughts, she smiled with the sweetness and tenderness which now came so rarely to her face. I went down, and she put her arms about my shoulders, and her cheek against mine, and said:

'When you have people to your home, young Rose, they will be different from this riff-raff. You'll entertain the best people in the land.'

'I thought you despised them,' I said.

She pulled a little self-mocking face, and said, 'I have to, haven't I, dearie? What else could I do? Make myself unhappy because they turn up their aristocratic noses at me?'

'If I ever have a house of my own,' I said stubbornly, 'I'll never have anyone but the people I really like. My real friends.'

'Real friends?' she said. 'Who are they? I've never known anyone who hasn't wanted something from me. Real friends are like real lovers—something folk dream about.'

I thought of Brendan, and knew he had been a real friend to me, and that I had been dreaming of him as a real lover too. Now it seemed as though I would never have the chance of knowing him again, either as a friend or as a lover. But eighteen is an optimistic age—I still had tomorrow, Friday, the last day of the meeting, when Cornucopia ran in the Hardwick Stakes. Tomorrow, surely, *surely* I would be lucky and get a chance of seeing Brendan again.

I put on my cloak, and Aunt Min came bustling up out of the kitchen, tying her bonnet strings.

'Come straight back as soon as you've dropped Rose,' said Sophie. 'I need you here, Min, to look after the ladies' cloaks and to watch the caterers' men.'

'Shall I come back alone?' I said, surprised, for she had always been so fussy about that evening trip home from the theatre.

'No,' she said quickly, 'I've told Hugh he can escort you. As a great favour. He'll be waiting for you with a carriage after the show.'

When we were trotting along Oxford Street I asked Aunt Min: 'What's the idea?' The shops were all alight, and I thought how awful to be a shop-girl, working from eight to eight, on your feet all day for a miserable wage, sleeping in cold dormitories in the staff homes. 'What's Sophie up to? Does she hope that little Hughie will propose to me?'

'Heaven knows,' said Aunt Min grumpily. 'She's got her ideas. Dinner parties now! What next, I'd like to know? Run

orf me feet all night as well as all day now, I suppose! Ladies' cloaks indeed! Fine lot of ladies they are when they get enough champagne into them. Swear like a lot of 'orse thieves, some of them can!'

It was no use talking to Aunt Min when she had set in for a real grumble. She dropped me at the theatre, and in the dressing-room there was an enormous basket of pink roses waiting for me from Hugh. The girls all quizzed me, and when they heard he was calling for me after the show, were all a-chatter with excitement. He was certainly going to 'pop the question'. 'What a lark!' 'You'll be Lady Woodbourne one day, Rosie.' 'Ask me to the wedding, Rosie!' 'I suppose you'll turn up your nose at us when you're one of the nobs, Rose!'

I said I was not going to marry Hugh, and I meant it; and I also said I was certain that he was not going to ask me to marry him, though this I did not believe—I could see Sophie's planning too plainly. But the girls believed neither of my statements, and I had to put up with a lot of teasing that night, both on stage and in the dressing-room.

Sure enough, Hugh was there waiting for me, pink-faced, anxious-eyed, immaculately starched and groomed in his evening clothes. He handed me into the carriage, and we jingled off down the Strand in a strained and nervous silence.

I wanted to laugh. It was so ludicrous. Here was this rather jilly but quite pleasant young man about to ask me to spend the rest of my life with him, and we knew each other so little that even the thought of broaching the subject plunged him into an agonised silence. I could not imagine what kind of marriage or love affair could possibly start from such an unlikely beginning. If he was scared now, surely he would be terror-stricken if I accepted him and he had to face the appalling ordeal of confronting his family with this fact.

I felt so sorry for him that I thanked him prettily for his flowers. I had kept a few of the blooms, which I had pinned into my cloak, and had sent the rest to a hospital. I thanked him for escorting me home, which seemed to loosen his tongue.

'Miss Rose,' he said, 'when your sister said I might call for

you tonight, I was very happy. I—I think you know why.'

This was the cue for me to pretend I knew nothing, so I said nothing. I still felt as though I was acting in a play—one of the Frivolity shows—and any moment now, Hugh would burst out into 'Darling Little Blue Shoes'. I was wearing blue shoes too—satin ones, with diamanté buckles and when I caught a glimpse of the toes beneath my skirts I nearly laughed aloud.

'I have come to realise, Miss Rose, that you are as good as you are pretty, and I ... well, I ... Rose, will you be my wife?'

Then, of course, it was not funny any more. For although he was young and rather foolish, he was deadly serious, and according to the world we lived in it was a great honour he was doing me.

I said abruptly, 'I'm sorry, Hugh, no.'

'No?' he said in shocked surprise.

He must have been screwing up his courage for a long while knowing the family opposition he would have to face, and knowing that his uncle, however infatuated he was with Sophie, would scarcely approve of such a match for his heir.

I don't think Hugh thought I loved him, for he was not conceited, but he could not have imagined for a moment that I would turn him down. Why should he? In the world he lived in he was a great prize in the matrimonial stakes. That I, an outsider, should not even want to compete for him was against all the rules of the game.

I must confess his surprise gave me a little feeling of pride, and I understood how Marjorie and Aunt Flora felt waving their banners for Women's Rights. I said:

'No, Hugh. I'm very sorry.'

'There's someone else?' he asked suspiciously.

'If there is,' I snapped, 'it's no business of yours. I belong to myself, don't I?'

'But Sophie said ...'

'I don't care what Sophie said. I don't belong to Sophie either. She can do what she likes with her own life, but she's not going to tell me what to do with mine!'

This was not quite true—Sophie had a considerable say in my affairs and I knew it, but I was cold with anger. I knew at that moment exactly what Marjorie and Aunt Flora were fighting for. If it had been Brendan, we would have got into a slanging match, both our tempers flaring; but this was Hugh, and his youthful face looked so disconsolate that my anger evaported.

'I'm sorry, Hugh,' I said more gently, 'but there are two reasons why I don't want to marry you. One is that I don't love you. I know girls do marry men they don't love, and everyone will say that I'm silly and sentimental; but I'm going to try not to do that, and I hope I don't have to.'

'But—you may come to care for me in time.'

'Oh, fiddle!' I said impatiently. 'That's what they say in sentimental novels. I might. It might rain tomorrow! I want to love someone so much that I can't live without them. That I don't feel alive unless I'm with them. That I'd throw anything away, my life, *anything*, for them. Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad. That's how I want to feel.'

'I see,' said Hugh blankly. Then, 'What's the other reason?'

'Your mother and sisters would be ashamed of me. If I can't marry for love, at least I won't marry a man whose mother won't receive me.'

'I see,' he said again.

He took out a case, and opened it. As we drove up Park Lane, the gas-lights caught the glitter of the diamonds.

'I was going to ask you to wear this,' he said.

I closed up the box and put it in his pocket. 'Never mind. I like you very much, Hugh. Let's be friends. I could do with some good friends.'

'You mean—you'll see me again?'

'Why not?' I said carelessly.

As soon as we got out of the carriage at Bayswater we could hear Sophie's party. Carriages were being walked up and down the street. There was an awning and a runner of red carpet over the path to the front door and we could hear laughter and music, and noisy voices.

From outside, it might have been any conventional party, but inside it was not. Aunt Min opened the door, her face like a block of wood, her tired old eyes sullen. From the drawing-room there was singing, and a noisy crash of glass. Two young men stumbled out, their arms round each other's necks, their ties askew, white-faced, hurrying unsteadily towards the downstairs lavatory. On the bottom step in the hall, a pretty girl I knew by sight was sitting with her hair down, and her dress half off her shoulders, drinking champagne out of a bottle, while a drunken man pawed at her arms and breast.

Hugh's hand tightened on my arm.

'You can't go in there,' he said.

'Why not?' I asked. 'It's my home.'

'If only I could take you right away from it all,' he said unhappily.

I looked into his kind, girlish face, and knew he was filled with manly indignation, and that the sort of girls he knew would have screamed or fainted and implored to be taken away. I thought of the dark threatening East End streets of my childhood, and knew I was made of tougher material than he ever dreamed. That perhaps, if life had not been generous to me, I too might have been the sort of man's woman Sophie had become. I smiled and withdrew my arm from his grasp.

'But you can't, can you? Don't worry, Hugh. Nothing will happen to me.'

I drew my skirts round me and swept past the drunken couple on the stairs and went up to my room, locking the door tightly against any straying friends of Sophie's who might lose their way. From the window I saw Hugh leave at once. But it was nearly dawn before the rest of the company went, their noisy singing and drunken laughter waking the silence of the elegant and respectable square. Somehow it made me think of Sophie flinging her defiance in the face of the rich and respectable, and challenging them to prove that they were any better or different from herself.

I slept late next morning, so I did not see Sophie until we

were ready to set out for the races. She came down into the drawing-room looking as fresh as a daisy, every detail of her clothes perfect, skin and eyes fresh and clear, showing no signs of the late-night party. Although the last day of Ascot is not so smart, she wore an elaborate dress of brown lace over flame-coloured taffeta, with flame-coloured roses in her big hat made of ochre chiffon. Though she had not been to bed until dawn, she must have been up for at least two hours to look like this, and when we met Woodbourne at Waterloo he gazed at her with startled admiration.

But on the way to Waterloo, she had looked at me, and said, 'Well?'

'Well what?' I parried.

'What did Hugh say last night?'

'He asked me to marry him.'

She drew in a little breath, her clear, hard eyes on my face, and said, 'And you said no?'

'Yes.'

'You're a damned little fool, Rose. Hugh is over twenty-one. His people can't stop him marrying. His mother and Woody's horse-faced wife may object, but I could make Woody sweet and see there was a settlement. Don't you see, Rose, you'd be free? You wouldn't have to put up with anything from anyone if you were Hugh's wife.'

'Except Hugh,' I said. 'I'd have to put up with him. I'm not—not giving myself to a man I don't love, not in marriage or out of it, Sophie. You know what it's like, don't you? Why then do you want it for me?'

'Why, you little . . . !'

For a moment I thought she would strike me, then she bit her lip and turned away. 'It's different when you're married,' she said.

'You were married to Dan. Was it so different?'

'That was the most stupid thing I ever did.'

I wondered where all the sisterly tenderness that had been between us had gone. Every day seemed to eat a little more of it away. Every day she seemed to get harder, smarter, more

beautiful—farther away from the kind sister who had cared for me so much. I put my hand on her knee and said, pleadingly, 'Don't let's quarrel, Sophie.'

She smiled, and sighed in an exasperated way, and touched my cheek. We drew into the entrance to the station, and Hugh was there with Lord Woodbourne waiting for us. She glanced at me enquiringly, and I said, 'I told him it made no difference . . . that he could come whenever he wanted.'

She was all smiles then. 'Maybe you've been a lot cleverer than you know, little Rose.'

That day I saw Brendan again.

I managed to lose the party. During the race in which Lord Woodbourne's horse was running, I stayed at the back of the box, and when they were all watching the race, I opened the door and slid unobtrusively through, and ran down the steps to the lawns, and asked one of the officials where the saddling enclosure was. I knew Brendan would be watching the race, but I knew he would come back there as soon as it was over. I stood in agony, a very conspicuous figure in white spotted muslin with a large white hat trimmed with pale blue flowers, exceedingly conscious of the glances of the stable boys and trainers and owners. Ladies only come to this racing holy of holies escorted. They did not just stand there alone and unattached.

Presently Brendan and Mr. Vestry came leading the horse, which had run third. They saw me at once.

Dear Mr. Vestry beamed all over his red face and said, 'Well, young Rose, have you come to see Mother?' He always called Mrs. Vestry 'Mother', as so indeed did most of the stable lads. 'She didn't come along with us today. Said she'd had enough fuss and feathers for one week. She'll be rare disappointed to have missed you.'

Brendan just said, 'Hello, Rosie.'

I looked at him. In his short fawn whipcord coat and breeches, and his cap at an angle, he was just as handsome as I remembered, and my eyes fell and my colour came and went under his glance and my heart raced until it hurt.

Mr. Vestry said, 'If you want to go off with Rose a while, Brendan, it's all right, lad. The boy and I will see to the horse.'

Brendan hesitated, and then to my heartfelt relief, he said, 'Thank you, sir.'

He took my arm, and we walked away, past the paddock, away from the stands and the Royal Enclosure. We walked in silence, as Hugh and I had been silent last night, only now it was I who was in a whirl of terrified anxiety.

'I—I'm sorry about Dan,' I said.

'Yes,' he said grimly. 'It was a risk he always took . . . but it was a well-run place, and the police turned a blind eye. Someone wanted him put away.'

'You're still with Mr. Vestry, then?'

'Yes.'

'I'm glad—Sophie said she'd put in a good word for you.'

He turned, his handsome face furious and incredulous. 'She *what*?'

'She said she'd put in a word for you.'

'So Dan and I both owe our present positions to her? That's ripe, that is! Is that what you came to tell me?'

'I thought—I thought I might see you,' I ventured.

'What for?'

'Well . . . I . . .' I stood there miserably, and then burst out like a silly child, 'Well, you kissed me. That day on the Downs. I thought it meant something to you.' I waited, blushing furiously, not daring to raise my eyes—all my recently-acquired sophistication deserting me.

He put out a hand, calloused with work, smelling of leather like a saddle-room, and touched my face. His touch was always gentle, like the touch of a wing, in spite of his strength.

He lifted my face, so I had to meet his eyes. 'And did it mean anything to you, Rose?'

'Yes!' I stormed. I had to sound angry, or I should have cried. 'You know it did . . . You know about women, and about love and life, and I don't know anything. Not yet. I thought you might have gone to Australia without seeing me again . . .

and I just couldn't bear it . . .'

He was still holding my face. 'What about this young Mr. Travers?' he said. 'I hear that it's a settled thing. I hear that Woodbourne will make his family accept it, for Sophie's sake, and you'll be queening it over us all as my lady one day. I didn't think it was for me to put a spoke into Sophie's plans. They seem to be working out in grand style.'

'He asked me to marry him, and I turned him down,' I said. 'And Sophie said I was a fool.'

His hand fell away on to my shoulder, tightened on the muslin frills, drew me towards him. For a moment I thought he was going to kiss me there, in full sight of everyone, and I stood quite still, not caring, longing for him to do it.

'You're a fool, all right,' he said, gently. 'The bonniest, sweetest, dearest little fool in all the world. A little kicking mare, with her head pulling high, fighting the world. I'll bet there's a streak of Irish in your breeding somewhere, Rosie, you're so stubborn.'

The hand slipped down my shoulder, twined into my hand, big and hard and strong, and I was filled with delight. It was going to be like that day on the Downs, I thought, the two of us hand in hand together in the sunshine, and nothing else in the whole world mattered at all.

Then I felt him stiffen. I looked up, and he was looking over my head to someone beyond. I turned and saw a stiff, soldierly man with a waxed moustache and a dark suit and bowler, not in the least like one of the racegoers, standing watching us. He beckoned to Brendan, who moved me aside and went over to him. They spoke together for a moment, then Brendan came back to me, all the tenderness gone, and I knew there was no chance of my sunny, happy day.

He said, 'Go back to Sophie, Rose. Tell her that Dan's broken jail, and that both she and Woodbourne had better look out for themselves. That man's a plain-clothes copper—they've lost Dan's trail in the crowd here. I'll go and try to find him. Maybe he'll listen to me. Tell her, for God's sake, to be careful.'

I wanted him to say something to *me*, but he seemed to have forgotten me. He was only thinking of her danger. He left me there, and in a moment was lost in the crowd round the paddock. I stood there for a moment, fighting my longing to burst into angry tears, and then I hurried back across the lawns to rejoin Lord Woodbourne's party.

CHAPTER SIX

I COULD not get near Sophie to tell her Brendan's message. All the way back in the train she was very gay, and there was a great deal of laughter, and Woodbourne was by her side the whole time. She looked magnificent on this day, still so young but with all the assurance, the poise and the worldly-wise confidence of a woman twice her years. She had won a lot of money, and this was the cause of great amusement, for she had been teasing Woodbourne by flouting his expert advice and insisting on his putting ten-pound bets on for her on horses which she had picked out haphazardly from the card. They had all won, one after the other, against all the rules of form and all the indications of the betting market, causing great hilarity every time they came up.

Berman the diamond millionaire laughed uproariously, and on the last two races, followed her fancies, placing heavy bets and winning a great deal of money.

'Id somedimes happens,' he crowed in his guttural voice, delighted to see Lord Woodbourne proved wrong. 'Id somedimes happens. Ven dings are right for you, play your luck hard, and dey vill all turn your way. Today, Sophia, you cannot go wrong. Today everyding vill come right for you, you vill see. Vish for the moon, Sophia, and Lady Luck vill give id to you!'

She turned her smiling face, and said, 'Will it, Berny? I wonder. They say lucky in cards, unlucky in love. Do horses count as cards? Is it the same thing?'

'And vich vould you prever to be lucky in, my beauty girl? Chance—or love, *hein*?'

She smiled across at Woodbourne, but there was no love in her smile, and said, 'I want it all ways, Berny! Love and luck! The whole shoot. That's what I want. Don't we all?'

'Ve all vant it, Sophia, but ve don' get id—id's against the law of averages to ged all you vant all de dime. You take vat you can while you can, Sophia, and play it safe.'

But I thought she would probably get everything she wanted, she seemed so triumphant.

No one was taking much notice of me, though Sophie tried to bring me into the general gaiety. I suppose all that crowd thought I was stuck-up and doing my 'my Lady Prig' act; but I was too miserable to even pretend to be gay and sociable, and poor Hugh, sitting beside me, trying to please and amuse me, began to look very cast-down.

Brendan had so completely forgotten about me when he had heard of Sophie's danger. It was one of those moments when one is young when one feels completely inadequate. I had been longing to see him again, and so unreasonably sure in my heart that when I did, everything would be all right. For a moment we had drawn together. What had he called me? 'The bonniest, sweetest, dearest little fool in all the world!' For a moment the old affection had been in his eyes, and in his touch. And then my sister's name had killed it all.

It seemed to me then an admirable thing to be like Sophie, sailing ruthlessly over everything like a lovely ship in full sail. I thought it was because she knew about men. They were like clay in her hands. She could make them do anything she wanted—even Brendan. Suddenly I hated being 'my Lady Prig'. I hated being young, inexperienced, virgin; I hated my education, which had given me my ladylike manners and ways of speech. What use was all this to me, when Sophie could

laugh like a man at a dirty joke, and call a millionaire or an earl 'ducks', and have him at her feet?

At Waterloo, Jakes was waiting for us with the carriage. We dropped Lord Woodbourne at his club in St. James's Street, then drove across the Park home. The minute we had left him she turned on me, and said, 'And what's the matter with you, Miss Glumface?'

'I saw Brendan at the races.'

She said angrily, 'I thought as much ... I noticed you sneaking away.'

'He told me to tell you that Dan has escaped from prison, and that you must take care. He said he would try to find Dan, and see what he could do with him.'

She looked at me and said eagerly, 'What did he say? What exactly did Brendan say?'

'He said, "Tell her, for God's sake, to be careful!" '

She did not answer for a moment, but her face had the same sort of triumphant radiance it had worn all day. The 'winning look'. As if nothing could go wrong for her.

'I was cross with you for sneaking off, Rosie. You've got wonderful chances of making a fine marriage. Woody tells me that Hugh really is a case about you. It may seem a bit mean, like, for me to go on at you about Brendan when he's been such a friend, but I don't want you to make a fool of yourself for a pair of handsome eyes, like I did once.'

She paused and then said with a little smile, 'But it's just as well you were so silly this time. I'm not scared of Dan, but forewarned is forearmed.' She had a pretty handbag on her lap made of cream kid with a gold clasp and chain, and there was so much money in it she could not close it. She looked at it, smiling to herself, and said, 'Old Berny said you couldn't have it all the way all the time. But just some of the time—that would be enough, wouldn't it, Rose? That would be enough for me!'

The desolation in my heart grew until I was nearly in tears. She took one of the bundles of notes and pushed it into my

hands, saying, 'Buy yourself something pretty, and stop wearing that gloomy face, love.'

I threw it back into her lap. 'I don't want any of your beastly money!' I said.

She stared at me in surprise. It was the first time there had ever been real enmity between us. She said, 'Oh, all right—just as you like.'

She pushed the money back into the bulging handbag, but I could see she was hurt. Then I remembered all the years that she had stood between me and the world, and how generously she had cared for me, and I felt both unhappy and mean.

When we reached home it was after six, so I went straight up to change before I went to the theatre. Hugh was calling for me after the show, and I decided that I'd stop being 'Lady Prig'. Instead of driving me straight home, he could take me out to supper somewhere like a regular Frivolity girl. To Romanos or Verreys or Frascatis. I had not been to Romanos since Dan had taken us when he and Sophie were married. I had an evening dress of rose-red velvet which I had not worn, so I put it on. It had a mantle to match, lined with white satin, and I wore satin shoes of the same red. I looked at myself in the glass and hoped I looked dashing and dangerous. I wondered if it would help if my hair was waved instead of being straight and smooth. I remembered Brendan had said once that if I wore black velvet, a Merry Widow hat and diamonds I would still look like Alice-in-Wonderland. I had thought that rather pretty at the time. It didn't comfort me now.

Down in the house I heard the doorbell. Out of curiosity I went to the window, and presently I saw a messenger-boy go down the steps, tucking an envelope into his little leather satchel. I wondered who had sent a message at that time that needed a reply. Sophie had been talking of having the telephone installed in the house to save the endless expense of district messengers.

Aunt Min brought me up a tray with some cold chicken, and a glass of wine, and as soon as I had finished, she came up

again to tell me that Jakes had brought round the carriage to drive me to the theatre.

'Doesn't Sophie want it?'

'She ain't going out tonight,' said Aunt Min. 'Got a headache, she says.'

I stared. 'She looked splendid when we came back from the races.'

'Oh, well,' said Aunt Min, 'if you ask no questions you get told no lies. You'd better get a move on, if we're not going to be late.'

'There's plenty of time.'

'She wants you to make a call for her on the way,' said Aunt Min. 'Go on down, while I gets me bonnet.'

I went down into Sophie's room. She was wearing her embroidered golden-yellow kimono, with her glorious hair all about her shoulders, and was writing a note. I saw, under the ornament, the buff envelope the district messenger had brought.

She turned and saw me standing in the door in my red dress and mantle. Her face changed, and she said, 'Why, Rose! I haven't seen you in that one before.'

'Don't you like it? It's one I chose myself.'

'It's very grown-up.' She looked at me strangely. 'I'm not so sure I like you looking like that. Is Hugh calling for you after the show tonight?'

'Yes.' I looked at her defiantly, and said, 'I'm a bit sick of being known as "Lady Prig". I thought I'd let him take me out to supper.'

I waited, expecting her to protest and forbid it, for it had been one of the things she would never allow; but a curious smile came into her eyes, and she said, 'It might be a good thing, at that.' She signed her note, and addressed the envelope to Lord Woodbourne—from where I stood I could read it, for her big handwriting practically filled the envelope. 'Would you drop this at Woody's club in St. James's on your way down? No answer. It's just to tell him not to come tonight.'

'Aunt Min said you had a headache.'

She flashed a grin at me as I took the envelope. 'A convenient one. This week at the races has been damn tiring, and I'm sick of lobster and champagne. I thought I'd put my feet up, and let old Min bring me up a tray.'

She caught my hand, and drew me down to kiss her as I took the note, so much my dear Sophie of early days; and yet I knew it was false, an act to bind me to her and to blind my eyes. 'Have a good time tonight, Rose,' she teased. 'And no private room—remember! All right to forget "Lady Prig", but don't forget the future Lady Woodbourne!'

Aunt Min came grumbling up the stairs from the kitchen, warning me I should be late. But Jakes had worked out the journey from home to the Frivolity to a second now, and I always entered the theatre exactly twenty minutes before the curtain went up. He drove to St. James's first, and I gave the linkman the note for Lord Woodbourne, and then went on to the theatre. There were the usual flowers from Hugh, a basket of white camellias tonight filling the stuffy dressing-room air with their heavy, sweet smell.

All the dressing-room and green-room talk was about the races and everyone's winnings and losses. George Deward had had a winner and was giving a big party after the show and many of the girls were going; but I said no, and told them defiantly that I was going out to supper with Hugh.

When I came down and he was waiting outside the stage door, looking, in spite of his tailoring, his top-hat and buttonhole, very young, I was at a loss how to announce my decision. I wanted to be very bold and gay. Instead, I said like a schoolgirl, 'Sophie has given me permission to go out to supper with you tonight, Hugh, if you would like to take me.'

His face lit up with delight. 'I say, how absolutely spiffing! Where would you like to go?'

'I'd like to go to Romanos. In the restaurant, of course.'

'Of course,' he said solemnly. 'I wouldn't dream of suggesting anything else.'

When we arrived at the restaurant he escorted me to a table

and I could hear the whispers of comment running around behind me as he helped me to take off my mantle. There were quite a lot of the girls from the show there, and quite a lot of men whom he knew, and theatrical people whom I knew. I could guess what they were saying. Were we engaged—or was 'Lady Prig' coming off her high horse at last?

It was not at all the sort of evening that I expected. I suppose I had thought it would be rather like the Merry Widow, all very dashing, and champagne out of shoes, and that sort of thing. But the minute Hugh had ordered, he leaned over the table and took my hand, and said solemnly, 'I've been talking to my mother about you, Rose.'

'Oh?' It was my turn to be taken aback.

'Until last night, Rose, when I took you home, I never realised how difficult life can be for a pretty, unprotected girl.'

He coloured a bit, and plunged on:

'I suppose because I met you with Mrs. Brady I got the wrong impression about you, and I've been thinking, as you met me with my Uncle Courtney, you've possibly got the wrong impression about me too. Well, I'm not like him at all. Not really. My father was not in the least like him, although they were brothers, and I'm like my father, or so they say. I want you to know, Rose, that whatever I may have said or thought in the past, my feelings now towards you are strictly honourable.'

'Thank you, dear Hugh.' I was touched. It was a pity that when Hugh was being serious I always wanted to laugh. In spite of the unhappiness of the afternoon the amusement curled wickedly inside me. I could always imagine Marjorie, or Aunt Flora—or indeed Sophie—listening to his earnest words, and could catch the glint of laughter in their eyes.

'What,' I said, 'did you tell your mother about me?'

'I told her that you were the most beautiful, bravest and best girl I had ever known. And I told her what you said—about never marrying a man whose mother wouldn't receive you.'

'And what did she say to that?' I asked apprehensively. I

had seen the handsome and formidable Lady Elspeth Travers at Ascot and driving in the Park sometimes, usually accompanied by her two débutante daughters, both as pink-faced, curly-haired and cherubic as their brother Hugh. Lady Elspeth always looked straight through Sophie and me, of course, although that cool, clever face was not in the least like the ladylike martyrdom of Lady Woodbourne.

'She said,' said Hugh, and he did not appear to see it as either funny or rude, 'she said you were a smarter girl than she had anticipated.' I gave a stifled little yelp of laughter, and he went on adoringly, 'And of course, I agreed. I said that you were smarter in every way than anyone I had ever met.'

I said, again, and sincerely, in spite of my amusement, 'Thank you, dear Hugh.'

Suddenly, I managed to forget the disastrous afternoon, and my agonised and anxious search for Brendan, my brief moment of happiness and my admission to myself that there was something between him and Sophie which I had tried so hard not to see. Hugh's transparency was infectious, and I did not want to be a *femme fatale* or play the Frivolity Queen any more. I was just a girl of eighteen out with a rather nice boy of twenty-one, and enjoying myself very much.

For the first time we really talked, and for the first time I learned quite a lot about him. For the first time I understood how much all this man-about-town appearance of his was not so much a pose, as a duty. Hugh thought, a young fellow when he leaves school ought to sow a few wild oats—travel a bit—know the town—before he settles down, don't you know. He admired his uncle's supreme sophistication, and had set out to emulate him. But really his heart was in the country and deep in country things, and Lord Woodbourne had a better heir than he realised, for Hugh would one day be a perfect, old-fashioned country squire, kind, simple and unquestioningly honest. His pink, girlish face would become red and weather-beaten with riding to hounds, and his light voice would become rougher, and he would marry a nice pink girl and have a family of nice pink children. He would always be a darling and

rather a bore. That evening I think we knew each other and liked each other better than we had ever done, and it was after midnight before he summoned a cab to drive me home.

On the way home Hugh with excessive delicacy took my hand, and asked if he might kiss me, and I said he might, and he did; and I remembered Brendan's kiss and the ecstasy I had felt, and I knew I was the sort of woman who preferred the sort of man who would take a kiss rather than plead for one. But Hugh had given me a pleasant evening, and I liked him, so I thought he deserved some sort of reward, and whatever the rules of the game were I just couldn't flutter and protest and say, 'Oh, *Hugh*...! Mr. Travers, how could you!' Because it seemed to me the most natural thing in the world to want to do.

Sitting there beside him I thought how ridiculous the conventions were. For most people would have considered I was in deadly moral danger, riding home unchaperoned, with a *man*. In reality, of course, Hugh was in much more danger than I was, because he was rich and if I decided to bamboozle him into marrying me he had a great deal more to lose than I. I had only what was mysteriously called my 'honour'. (I could never think why it was called that. I suppose the word 'virginity' scared polite people.)

There was once a Golden Age, but I felt I was living in the Age of Hypocrisy, because everyone thought more of what people thought of them than of being honest with themselves. I suppose that was what was wrong with me, and with Sophie and Marjorie and Aunt Flora Morrison. We didn't fit the pattern cut out for women, and we would never be quite happy because we would always resent it. This made me think of Brendan, and his longing for a new, big free country, where the lady-and-gentleman nonsense did not matter; and as we neared the house, all my unhappiness came back again.

When we drove up to the house there was a light in Sophie's room. As the carriage stopped, the curtains were drawn aside sharply for a moment, and I could see her head, with her hair down about her shoulders, silhouetted against the light within.

Then an arm came across before her and drew her back, letting the curtain fall. She was not alone.

I glanced at Hugh, and saw his anguished expression in the light that fell from the fan-light over the door. I said quickly, 'Don't worry, Hugh. What Sophie does doesn't affect me.'

'I know, but I hate your having to be here.'

We went up the front steps. He took my key, unlocked the door for me, handed the key back and raised his hat to bid me good-night. I would never have asked him in at this hour, of course, even if Sophie had been up or had had guests. As I opened the front door I could see a man's fawn whipcord overcoat thrown over a chair in the hall, and I stood in the doorway staring at it, feeling sick inside, knowing it was the coat that Brendan had worn at the races that afternoon.

I stood there irresolutely, staring at it, wanting to run back into the darkness, knowing that Brendan was in the house with Sophie and that I could not bear to spend the night there.

I had forgotten all about Hugh standing behind me in the porch, waiting for me to turn and bid him good-night. Suddenly he cried out, and there was the sound of heavy feet stumbling up the steps outside. I swung round and saw Dan Brady standing on the step just behind Hugh.

His hair was shorn close, and his face had a curious muddy pallor, from which his dark-ringed eyes blazed. Unlike his last appearance, broken and waveringly uncertain, he now seemed filled with a terrible certainty of purpose. He wore some coarse dark clothes, such as rough sailors and dock-workers wear, and a peaked cap pulled over his eyes, and one hand thrust into the pocket of his jacket. He did not seem to see either Hugh or me—his eyes were fixed ahead on the staircase.

Hugh raised his cane and barred Dan's way, but Dan, although a shadow of his former self, was still an enormous man, and he thrust Hugh blindly on one side and lunged into the house.

I shrieked with fear. I could see the murder in his eyes. I hung on to his arm, saying I don't know what to delay him, pleading with him to go away, calling to Hugh to get a police-

man. But Dan just went on up the stairs dragging me with him as though I were a tree branch, or something inanimate that blocked his way. At the turn of the landing he shook me off, and I went sprawling back down the stairs in a bundle of mantle, long dress and frilly petticoats.

Hugh leapt to help me, but I was up and racing after Dan, shouting to Hugh, 'Go and get a policeman! Never mind me! Hugh, for God's sake—he'll murder them!'

As I reached the wide landing outside Sophie's door, the door opened, and the whole glowing interior of white and gilt, of blue satin and crystal, showed like a picture behind Brendan's tall young figure. He stood looking steadily at Dan, standing between Sophie and any possible harm. Sophie stood behind him, like a golden column entwined with flowers in her beautiful kimono with her long hair loose about her shoulders, her face alight with that reckless, glowing triumph that she had worn all day, but with not a scrap of fear in her eyes.

Dan's hand had been thrust into his pocket, and as he had rushed up the last few steps he had drawn out a gun. But now he stood, staring, an awful look of sadness came across his stricken face. He said, 'Brendan? *Brendan?*'—like a question, as though he longed for someone to tell him that Brendan was not there.

Brendan said, 'Give me that gun, Dan. You're not killing anyone. I'm not going to let you!'

Dan stood motionless, and then he said, as though to himself:

'*Brendan.* My boy Brendan!'

He dropped the gun into his pocket, and covered his face with his hands, his great shoulders shaking with sobs. Brendan stepped towards him, hand outstretched, but Dan beat the hand down violently, turned and plunged back down the stairs —blindly, as he had come: a man destroyed by jealousy and love, unaware of everything about him, purposeless and sightless, not knowing where he was going or why.

Sophie ran forward, calling, 'Brendan—Brendan, my darling—don't follow him!' She caught Brendan's arm, and tried

to hold him back, but he shook her off, saying, 'I must see he doesn't harm himself,' and followed Dan out into the night.

I became aware of everything as though I was waking from a foul dream. I could see Aunt Min and Smithers peering, twittering with fear, over the upstairs banisters; the open door of the empty hall below; and Sophie standing there pale and smiling and as beautiful as a demon.

For the first time in our lives, she had neither thought nor care for me. She was like a woman under a spell. She could only think of Brendan—I think she could only see Brendan. Her only care was that no harm should come to him.

I said the first thing that came into my stunned mind.

'I'm going,' I said. 'I'm going now. I'm not going to sleep in this house again.'

She looked at me with that sleep-walking smile, those lovely, luminous eyes staring at me uncomprehendingly, and I turned and went downstairs into the hall.

At that moment Hugh came in at the open front door. He said Dan had been recaptured just outside. That the police had been close in pursuit and had only lost his trail in the last few hours. He looked at me, white-faced, shaken, and, I think, a little scared, by the primitive emotions he had just seen.

I said, 'I'm leaving, Hugh. I have some friends in Bloomsbury who said I could go to them at any time. Will you drive me there?'

His startled face filled with relief that I had somewhere to go and that I wasn't making him responsible for my welfare. I could imagine his embarrassment if he had had to try to book me into a hotel at this hour, in full evening-dress and with no luggage, or smuggle me into his bachelor rooms in Half Moon Street—or, as a last resort, take me to his mother's home and demand that she should offer me hospitality.

We went straight out, and I did not turn and look back, though I knew Sophie was standing on the stairs watching the front door, waiting for Brendan to return. Hugh's hansom cab was still waiting for him, the driver holding the horse's head, watching everything, full of curiosity.

As Hugh opened the door to help me in, Brendan came striding back down the road. He stopped, came to my side and took my arm authoritatively.

'Where the devil do you think you're going?' he demanded.

I jerked my arm away, and Hugh said indignantly, 'I don't consider this is a fit house for a young lady like Miss Eves to stay in!'

'No,' said Brendan, 'you're right about that, my boyo! And I don't consider either you or your precious uncle the right sort of men to protect her!'

'Mr. Travers,' I said with dignity, 'has made me an honourable proposal of marriage, which I am going to accept.' And I got in the cab and sat as far away as possible, averting my head.

For a moment there was complete silence.

Then Brendan demanded, 'Is this what you really want, Rose?'

I did not answer. I don't think I could have answered. I was choking with unhappiness, with resentment, with anger, and sick, sick, *sick* of them all.

Brendan said in a strange, absurd voice, 'I wish you well, young Rose. I wish you all the happiness the world can hold.' Then to Hugh, 'Look after her, sir.'

I heard his footsteps on the pavement as he went up through the gate to the house, and my head jerked round as though drawn by strings. Through the open door I saw Sophie, the golden column grown about with flowers, the golden flowing hair; I saw her running down to meet him with outstretched arms; and then my visions were blocked by Hugh getting into the cab beside me. The horse jerked forward, taking us away, and I burst into a passion of tears.

'Did you mean what you said?' Hugh asked wistfully.

I shook my head, trying to control my sobbing. 'I only said it to make him let me go.'

'He's in love with you!'

I wanted to laugh at this, and the laughter, rising through my tears, brought me on the verge of hysteria.

'He's in love with Sophie,' I managed to say, and nothing could disguise my bitter jealousy. 'He's in love with Sophie, like they all are, except you, Hugh, dear. That is one thing in your favour. You're the only man I know who is not crazy for Sophie.'

I don't know whether he found this a comfort or not, but he was very kind, and lent me a large silk handkerchief as my own scrap of lace was soaked with tears.

It was all dark in the Bloomsbury house, but after we had rung several times, Marjorie put her head out of the window, and hearing who it was came down in a large woolly check dressing-gown and let me in, shutting Hugh firmly outside, like the keeper of a convent door.

Aunt Flora took one look at my face and said, 'No questions until morning,' and they made the bed up in a bare little spare room and gave me some hot milk.

I thought I should never sleep. My thoughts were running round and round in my head like squirrels in a cage; but Aunt Flora must have put a sedative in the warm milk, because I *was* asleep the minute my head touched the pillow, and I didn't wake up until nine.

Aunt Flora was already at her desk, and Marjorie at the typewriter. They got me some tea and toast, and I told them what had happened. Aunt Flora listened quietly and said she thought I should go and see Sophie.

'I don't want to see her again,' I said.

'She's cared for you ever since you were a child. She will worry about you when she stops to think what she has done.'

'I don't care,' I said stubbornly. 'I don't care any more!'

Aunt Flora looked at me, and said, 'Poor little Rose,' and I flushed red, and knew she was not deceived.

'Well, I'll write to her,' she said quietly. 'She has a right to know you are in good hands. Besides, you must have some clothes. I take it you will continue at the theatre?'

'What else can I do?' I asked. 'I know it's hardly anything. Five pounds a week.'

'Many men keep a family of children on less than that,'

Aunt Flora said firmly, and I felt abashed. 'You can pay me a pound a week for your board and lodging, and have the spare room.'

I stayed there with them all that summer, through the warm July days. Aunt Min came with my clothes and I was quite startled to see how many I had, compared with Marjorie, and how fine they were. They filled the small wardrobe to overflowing. She also brought me some money from Sophie, but I refused that.

Aunt Min was as uncommunicative as usual. Nothing would ever shake her loyalty to Sophie, however much she grumbled.

'Not for me to say,' she said grumpily. 'A woman's a fool when she forgets which side her bread is buttered, and I've no quarrel with 'is lordship. Ah, well, we'll see! East End born and East End dead they say, and there's a lot of truth in it. You watch your step, young Rose.'

I had heard from the dressing-room gossip that there had been trouble between Woodbourne and Sophie. Hugh never mentioned them to me—since he had asked me to marry him I had become in his conventional mind the kind of girl before whom no nice man would discuss such things—but I felt sure that Woodbourne, for all his passion for Sophie, would never knowingly be made a fool of—he was too proud.

But when I was away from Sophie I could never forget her warmth, her love for me, her fierce protection of me as a child and the fact that many of the things she had done, she had done for my sake as well as her own. I knew that this passion for Brendan was something out of her scheme of things, something she had succumbed to and had not really wanted.

Aunt Min, out of force of habit, had helped me unpack the trunk and put away my clothes, and she looked round the Morrisons' flat with disapproval.

'Bit of an uncomfortable sort of place,' she said. 'Looks more like an orfice than an 'ome. This kitchen don't look as though it's ever 'ad a decent meal cooked in it.'

I had to admit she was right. Marjorie and Aunt Flora, who

were both out at a meeting that afternoon, seemed quite unaware of all the luxuries of taste and comfort which seemed the ruling purpose of Sophie's life.

I made Aunt Min a cup of tea and answered her questions, and she sniffed disapprovingly at my new way of life. I helped with the housework, I told her, and with the office work during the day. No, I was not one of 'these 'ere Suffragits' as she called them, but I helped out. I walked to the theatre from Bloomsbury, and managed on my salary.

'And do you ever see that young nephew of 'is lordship's?'

Yes, I told her. I often saw Hugh. He called for me after the show, more often than not, and sometimes took me to supper.

'You going to marry 'im?'

'I don't know,' I said stiffly.

'Seems a waste of all our Sophie's planning and everything if you don't,' said Aunt Min gloomily. 'Look arter yourself while you can, that's what I always says.' She rose stiffly to her feet and pulled on her little black cloak ready to go. She always wore black, with an old-fashioned bonnet tied beneath her chin.

'How are things—with Sophie?' I ventured, but I did not want to know.

Aunt Min looked at me, her little black eyes resigned and cynical. 'All right if you likes living on a volcano,' she said. With that I had to be content.

In August the theatre closed down, and everyone dispersed for the summer. Hugh had to accompany his mother and sisters on a round of visits, and then to Scotland, and I guessed one of the reasons was that his mother wanted to keep him away from London and from me. He told me that Sophie had gone with Lord Woodbourne to Deauville. He did not mention Brendan, and I did not ask. He left me with protestations of affection, and promises to write, which he did faithfully, renewing his offer of marriage. I read the letters and tore them up. Something told me Sophie would have kept every one.

I can't say I was miserable that summer. Even dedicated

suffragettes, it appeared, occasionally had a holiday, and Aunt Flora took Marjorie and me down to Wales with her, and for the first time in my life I had a real holiday, not like the boring summers in Epsom with Aunt Min. Aunt Flora had an old house on the Gower Coast, and I learned to swim and climb, and I rode the tough little ponies over the moors. There were other young people there, including Marjorie's charming Arthur Williams, amusing and intellectual, and quite dedicated in his pursuit of the fiery-headed Marjorie.

The movement for Women's Suffrage was moving towards militant methods, and Arthur said he felt that when that happened, both Marjorie and Aunt Flora would be in and out of jail quite a bit. I admired the equanimity with which he contemplated having a wife like Marjorie. 'I must work hard and get my degree next year, Rose,' he confided in me, 'because when they really start in on the Government I must be earning enough to bail Marjorie out when it's necessary.'

So I played and laughed, and enjoyed myself, and pretended that I had put all the past old life behind me and forgotten Brendan. I told myself I was tough, and not the willowy clinging type, and I could get over anything—and I suppose this was true. But I got thin, and I played harder than anyone else, because I liked to be so tired when I went to bed that I could not lie awake thinking—thinking and wondering about that volcano that Aunt Min had spoken of, about Sophie and Brendan, and wondering what Lord Woodbourne would do when she left him, and whether it would break him as it had broken Dan.

Early in September we went back to Bloomsbury. Marjorie would be going up to Cambridge towards the end of the month, and I started rehearsing for a new show immediately after our return, finding this interesting and exciting, keeping me too busy to mope. I had a few lines to speak, and an opening chorus to myself, not because I had any particular talent, but because I had a good, strong, tuneful voice, and George Deward knew I was reliable and would not let him

down. I had another two pounds a week too, and felt quite rich.

Marjorie and Aunt Flora came to the first night, which was a great success, and Hugh came down especially from Scotland, and sent me a basket of white roses and orchids that nearly filled the dressing-room. Afterwards we went to George Deward's big party. Hugh told me that when his uncle and Sophie had returned from Deauville his uncle had gone up alone to Scotland to join the shooting party, and was still there. There had, he thought, been a split, and my heart turned over, wondering what had happened.

On the day after the first night I stayed late in bed, and Marjorie brought me a tray, and I got up about eleven and dressed in a plain navy skirt and sailor blouse and went in to see if I could help them. They were having a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square and there was a great deal of excitement. They set me addressing envelopes, and I got down to work.

About an hour afterwards the door opened. I didn't look up. The front door of the flat was open all day, and people continually came and went about the business of the cause. A voice said, 'I am Lady Elspeth Travers and I am looking for Miss Rose Eves.'

I looked up and jumped to my feet. Hugh's mother stood at the door, looking at me with her cool, smiling eyes. She was so tall and elegant that I was very conscious of my ink-stained fingers and not very tidy hair. Aunt Flora and Marjorie rose to their feet, Marjorie visibly bristling.

Lady Elspeth went over to Aunt Flora and took her hand, and said, 'My dear Miss Morrison—as a parasite, I must tell you how much I admire your work. You are quite right of course, and I know time will prove you to be so. This, I believe, is Miss Eves?'

I looked her in the eyes, bristling a bit myself now, but she said, 'I want to talk with you, my dear. I wondered if you could come for a little drive with me? Round Regents Park, perhaps? It's very pretty now with all the dahlias out.'

I glanced at Marjorie, who scowled, and then at Aunt Flora,

who smiled and nodded. I asked Lady Elspeth to excuse me while I put on a hat, and flew to scrub the ink off my hands, do my hair and put on a smart blue costume and little blue sailor hat. I was not going to be patronised by anyone, and I silently blessed the wardrobe Sophie had insisted on supplying me with.

It was a big open carriage, and a fine warm September day, and we bowled off into the Euston Road towards Regents Park.

Lady Elspeth did not mince matters. I liked her enormously at once. An upper-class woman, correct, well-bred, exclusive and mannered: but out of those snapping dark eyes looked a woman who had kinships with both Aunt Flora and Sophie. She had character.

'Well, my dear Miss Eves,' she said, 'when Hugh first started hanging round the Frivolity stage door, I feared there would come a time when you and I had to meet, and so it is. This summer in Scotland and elsewhere I have tried to break Hugh's determination to marry you, but as you no doubt have realised, it hasn't done the least bit of good. Tell me, why have you not agreed to marry him?'

'I think he told you.'

'Oh, yes. I thought it was a very sound reason. But supposing his mother would receive you, would you marry him—even if you did not love him?'

We turned into the gates of the park. The sun was reflected in the lake, and the dahlias were banked in colours. A few trees were beginning to turn from green to pale gold.

'I might,' I said.

She glanced at me shrewdly. 'I ought not to say this, but I think you're too good for Hugh.'

I looked at her, startled.

'Hugh is like his father, who was a nice person but never had any character or real brains. Now you have both, when you learn to use them. You showed real character in walking out on that sister of yours when you really understood what she was.'

'It wasn't for any moral reason,' I said bluntly. 'If you want to know the reason, it was because the man I loved fell in love with her and became her lover.'

I had tried, deliberately, to shock her, but she was not in the least shocked. She asked calmly, 'And have you got over that now?'

'Oh, yes,' I said, and thought I meant it. But she smiled and said:

'I was in love with Woodbourne, but he married the saintly Julia, and that served him right! But there are other things to prove your character. You are poor and pretty, but you have not exploited your prettiness. You've shown you can do without luxuries you've been brought up to take for granted. I've seen you with that sister of yours, dressed up like a little princess. It must have been hard to throw it all up and go to that uncomfortable madhouse in Bloomsbury with those worthy but misguided women.'

I shook my head. 'No. It's free there—and clean.'

She laid her hand on mine momentarily, and I knew she was touched.

'Well,' she said briskly, 'there is no doubt that Hugh will not forget you and that it will make him very unhappy if you do not marry him, but I must tell you that I wouldn't let that upset me if I thought you impossible. I find you far from impossible. Who knows, you may get to love him from habit. I did with his father. A gentle fellow, as different from that rakehell Woodbourne as chalk from cheese.' She gave a little reminiscent sigh.

'You mean—you don't object any more?'

'All the objections are on your side now.'

She smiled, tapped the coachman on the back with her long parasol, and told him to drive back to Bloomsbury.

'Now let me see—I'm giving a small little-season dance for those two girls of mine—if they were half as pretty as you I could spare myself the expense and the bother. I have a friend who will take you under her wing. It will be in the River Room at the Hotel d'Anjou in the Strand.'

I was a little startled. The Anjou, an enormous and opulent hotel, was one of Sophie's favourite places, and she often went to the restaurant there.

Lady Elspeth rattled on. 'I'm all for this new-fangled idea of giving private parties at hotels. The service is much better, and one doesn't get one's house turned into a bear-garden. I'll send you a card.'

The carriage clattered up to a standstill outside the tall old Bloomsbury house where the Morrisons had their flat.

She took my hand and held it. 'Just one thing, my dear. If I take you under my wing, I'll see that everyone in society accepts you. But I must ask you two things, if you accept Hugh's proposal. One is to give up the theatre. The other is not to see your sister again. Think about it. You're quite free to choose. You can run away with Hugh, and I can't do a thing about it. But I could make things very, very difficult or very, very easy for his wife.'

I said wryly, 'I quite understand, Lady Elspeth. And thank you for being so honest with me.'

I got down and went indoors. Whatever she was, she was a woman I could understand. Supposing, as she said, I ran off with Hugh and got married. We could live in the country, and not concern ourselves with society. Yet I knew that Hugh had been trained for the great position of Earl of Woodbourne and would consider it his duty to do all the conventional things that would be expected of him. He would never fly in the face of society like his uncle. I went slowly upstairs to the flat, and found Marjorie and her aunt having their usual scratched-up lunch of eggs and salad.

The looked up at me as I came in. I pulled off my gloves and hat and sat down with them.

'She's withdrawn her objections?' said Marjorie.

'Yes.'

'Will you marry Hugh, then?'

'I haven't decided.'

'It might be a great challenge to you, Rose,' said Aunt Flora

unexpectedly, 'to be a great lady. You might do a deal of good.'

'Yes,' I said, 'I've seen it from that point of view for the first time.'

The invitation, for the last week in October, came towards the end of the month. I was advised that Mrs. Reginald Camberley and her two daughters would call for me on the night of the dance, and I went to see Deward and asked for leave of absence. It was the first time I had ever missed a show, and he was kind and arranged for one of the other girls to understudy me; but I could see, from the way he shook my hand and wished me well, he thought he was talking to the future Mrs. Hugh Travers.

Hugh was so delighted, I felt guilty. I knew that he too thought that his mother's giving the invitation and my accepting it was tantamount to my accepting him. He waited for me every night, and sent me so many flowers I had to send them by cab to Charing Cross Hospital. I felt guilty because he was so happy and because I, in spite of everything, was still so unsure.

But one thing I was determined about—that whatever came of it, he should be proud of me; and I was again glad that I still had so many pretty clothes. I did not want to wear white like the society girls, but I did not want to wear my dashing rose-red velvet. I decided on a pretty new pale-blue chiffon gown which I had never worn. I fussed about getting shoes and stockings and new gloves, and I went down to Bond Street to make an appointment to get my hair done.

In the shop I came face to face with Sophie.

I think we both went white. She was buying some cosmetics, which the receptionist was making into a parcel for her. We stood looking at each other.

'I hear you're going to marry Hugh Travers,' she said.

'Then you heard incorrectly,' I replied.

I was trembling, almost as though I was afraid of her. Afraid of Sophie who had cared for me and held me in her

arms when I was a child. She turned her head, and beneath the veil I could see the tears glint. She looked older than I had imagined: somehow different—the bold, brazen, splendid self-assurance was a little tarnished.

Disregarding the shop-girl, she said, 'Rose, I can't go on like this. I've missed you, and worried about you, ducks, we've got to be friends. Come—come and talk to me, dearie, please. Look, maybe in a month or so I'll go out of your life, out of this country for ever. Don't let us part bad friends.'

Out of my life, out of this country? With whom? With Brendan? But—I loved her, damn her, and I always would. And I loved Brendan too, and I had to know if they were going away together.

'All right,' I said, 'let's talk. Where shall we go?'

We were outside the shop now, standing in the busy pavement with the traffic trotting by and the narrow street full of the stable smell of horse traffic. 'We'll go home,' she said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

We drove back to Bayswater. It seemed so long since we had driven together, and at first there was an extraordinary embarrassment between us, as though we did really come from quite different worlds. I don't know which one of us felt it most.

The house was just as gleamingly white and painted as ever, the brass knocker and letter-box polished, geraniums in the window-boxes . . . and yet the moment I went in the front door I was conscious of its being a kept woman's house. I had always known this, but now it was quite different. For nearly three months I had been away, living with two women who were not rich, whose busy lives were sparse and bare and lack-

ing in luxury, but who had an unquestioning self-respect and dignity, not just as females, but as human beings too. This pretty house, with its smell of expensive things, wine, cigars, scent, food, seemed to me abhorrent. I wanted to push all the windows open and let the air in.

Aunt Min came up grumbling to take Sophie's things and help her out of her tailor-made into a rest-gown. She looked at me, and said, 'Well, I see you've come back!'

I shook my head. 'No, Aunt Min. Only for half an hour. I must go then, Aunt Flora is expecting me to dinner. Actually I have to get it, because she has an afternoon rally, and Marjorie has gone up to college.'

'She must be barmy,' said Aunt Min, 'eating anything you cooked!'

'Oh, don't chatter, Min!' said Sophie irritably. 'What will you have, Rose?' She looked at me, then said, 'Oh, I suppose you'd like some tea. Bring tea, Aunt Min, and bring me a scotch and seltzer.'

Aunt Min went downstairs, casting up her eyes and muttering. Presently she came back with the silver tea-tray, and a tumbler containing what looked to be a very weak whisky indeed.

I had never seen Sophie drink in the afternoon before. In fact I had never seen her drink a great deal at all. A glass of champagne sometimes, but when other people were drinking she had usually been pretending to drink. Often at her parties or in her company other people might get tipsy, but never Sophie.

She reached forward and picked up the glass and looked angrily at Aunt Min.

'Look, Min, I'm not a baby. Bring the decanter and tray.'

Aunt Min stood her ground. 'You'll go the way your dad did,' she warned. 'He was all right and a 'andsome man until he took to getting comfort out of a bottle.'

Sophie's eyes flashed with anger. 'If you want to stay with me, Min, you'd better do as I say.'

Reluctantly Aunt Min went down and came back with the

cut-glass decanter and the soda siphon in its silver stand.

'Thanks.' Sophie added whisky to her glass, lit a cigarette and leant back among the cushions of her chaise-longue.

'What will you have for your dinner?' asked Aunt Min.

'I don't know. Go away, Min, and don't bother me.'

I sat silently, drinking my tea. When I was there Sophie had always dined out at some expensive restaurant, or else Woodbourne came here to eat one of Aunt Min's delectable little dinners.

She said abruptly, 'I'm not seeing Woodbourne now.'

'Why?'

'I haven't told him about Brendan,' she said, 'I'm not such a fool. In fact I went away with him this summer to France, hoping to forget Brendan, but that didn't work either.'

She looked at me defiantly.

'It's only made me want him more than ever. Woody knew something was wrong—a man does, and he's no fool. He offered to make me a settlement. An income for the rest of my life. This house, and the carriage—if I'd just stick to him. A fair offer—he's a generous man. I found I couldn't do it. Suddenly, Rose, I couldn't bear him to touch me. That's what falling in love does to you—even to me!'

She looked at me again, a touch of pleading behind her defiance, a little half-smile at herself for so drastically throwing away all her rules of living.

'If Brendan wants me to go to Australia with him, Rosie, I'm going. And I know he wants me to go.'

'What makes you so sure?' I said stiffly.

'I spoke to Mrs. Vestry—she told me that he had booked two passages to Australia. He hasn't fixed a date yet, but he's booked for two.'

'Hasn't he spoken to you about it?'

'How can he yet?' She rose to her feet, nursing her glass in her hands. 'How *can* he? I'm his brother's wife. But we're close, Rose. We have been now for years. It was like a fire waiting for someone to put a match to it. All these years growing, growing, and both of us trying to fight it and deny it. Back

in Drovny Street, when I was first married to Dan, I don't know what I should have done without Brendan then. He helped me, smoothing things out, keeping the men from pestering me, keeping Dan away from the drink—and then I realised Woodbourne was in love with me. You know what I am, Rose? What I've always been? I could see money, real money, safety and security for us and the chance to give you a real start, to meet and marry the right man. So I went out to get Woodbourne, and put Brendan out of my life. But I couldn't. I'd told myself I'd never be fool enough to fall in love again—but I did. That first time, with André, that was just green passion. Like we all are when we first start being women, and no more know what's wrong with us than young animals in spring. Although of course they do know.' She laughed. 'And we do too, only we're *supposed* not to. But this was different. Brendan's a real man, simple and kind, and strong, and brave and passionate. A real man. I fought against it, I wouldn' even let myself think about it, until that day when he though Dan might harm me, and then he forgot everything and came I know why he had stopped coming to Drovny Street. It was because of Woodbourne. But in the end, when I came back from Deauville and Woodbourne made his ultimatum, I turned Woodbourne down and I haven't seen him since.'

'What are you going to do?'

'I'm going with Brendan. Who will know whether we're married out there in Australia? A real man's woman, that's what he called me, and that's what I'll be to him. I'm not broke, Rose. I have money in the bank and my jewels are worth a lot of money. I'll sell them all. I don't mind roughing it with him. I'll help him get started.'

There was something strange about her eagerness, something childish, and yet something terribly tense and anxious.

'What about Dan?' I asked. 'And Lord Woodbourne?'

'I don't care about them. They've been paid.' She came and sat down near me, and said, 'But I care about you, Rosie, darling. I care desperately about you, leaving you here alone in England. What'll you do?'

'What you wanted me to, perhaps,' I said coldly. 'Marry Hugh Travers.'

'But you don't love him,' she said anxiously.

I laughed in her face. 'I thought that didn't matter? You told me yourself I was a fool to turn him down. It's a bit late to change your tune, isn't it, Sophie? You've taught me, Sophie, and I'm learning fast now. A woman's life depends on the sort of man she can get for herself, that's what you said. Well, you seem to have got the one man I could love, so there's no point in me getting sentimental, however you may feel. I'll go a long way before I find anyone who can do more for me than little Hugh.'

She got up, her face suddenly ravaged, saying, 'Don't *talk* like that, Rose! You sound like me! Like I used to talk! Hard and bitter, just out for yourself.'

She poured herself out another drink, and I could see the pretty white hands were shaking. I had never seen her like this.

'I hear Hugh's mother has invited you to one of her parties,' she said. 'Two months ago I'd have been delighted. But now, I know I want you to be happy too. Rose, my little darling . . .' She suddenly dropped down at my feet. 'Rose. I *cannot* give up Brendan.'

'Why should you?' I said. 'I'm not asking you to.'

'Rose, you could come with us. We would look after you. Brendan is very fond of you . . .'

'Fond?' I said scathingly. 'You are asking *me* to share a home with you? Two women loving the same man?'

'You will never forgive me, will you, Rose, for taking Brendan away from you? I tried to stop you falling in love with him, I tried to!'

'You tried to stop me with lies,' I said miserably, hating her, envying her, and still, deep in my heart, loving her. 'You could have told me the truth from the start. Well, you taught me how to play your game, and maybe I'll play it better than you.'

I rose. I wanted to put my arms round her and hold her

close to me, because she was all my family, all I really had in the world, but I was hating everybody at that moment, and so unhappy I was spiky with hurt.

'Hugh's mother made two conditions to her accepting me as Hugh's wife. One was that I should leave the stage. The other was that I shouldn't see you again.'

We stood looking at each other, Sophie's beautiful face so tragic and mine so cold and hard that I lifted my hand to my cheek and was surprised to find it soft and warm.

'All right,' she said brokenly. 'All right. I suppose I've asked for this. I understand. All right. But go away now, please, young Rose. Go away quickly.'

I went out of that house for the last time. I walked very fast, and in Queensway I took the tube back to Russell Square. I felt very curious. Quite empty, as though I had no emotions of any kind left. I told Aunt Flora that evening that I thought I would marry Hugh Travers.

If I did not feel anything, one way or the other, about anything, any more, the best thing was to be sensible and practical about my life. If I was not going to be happy, at least I could be as comfortable as possible, and so far as my future was concerned Hugh was a catch that any girl of any rank would jump at.

The evening of Lady Elspeth's dance came at last, and my chaperone, Mrs. Reginald Camberley, called for me at eight-thirty. She did not come up to the door, but sent up her groom, and Aunt Flora pulled a disapproving face, and Marjorie, who was down from Cambridge for the night, tilted up her nose, and said, '*Beastly snob!*' But I didn't care. I was armed against everything that night. No one could hurt me any more, and I looked beautiful and I knew it.

When I went down to the carriage in my dress of pale-blue chiffon and satin, wrapped warmly in a white velvet cloak, I smiled sweetly at Mrs. Reginald Camberley and her two plain daughters. Her suet-faced, white-gloved young son took one look at me and nearly fell out of the carriage in his anxiety to

help me in, and for the rest of the evening he hung about in a moon-struck way, pestering me for dances.

Mrs. Camberley was patronisingly sweet. I suppose she and her girls regarded me rather in the light of a bird of prey, a foreign and predatory species, swooping in to rob them of eligible young men. I realised then with what trepidation we Frivolity girls were regarded by society women.

'Dear Lady Elspeth tells me you are an actress, Miss Eves,' she said. 'Surely that must be a very dangerous life for a young gel?'

'It depends on the girl,' I said dryly. 'If she's a fool, any sort of life will be dangerous for her.'

The two girls gazed at my clothes, at my hair, which I wore smooth instead of in the fashionable bird's-nest frizz, wound into a plaited coronet on top of my head, the coronet held in place by a little wreath of forget-me-nots and stephanotis. I did not wear any jewels—I knew I needed nothing to call attention to my arms and shoulders. Being at the Frivolity had taught me to walk and hold myself well, and not to dither when I was the centre of attention. I could have been sorry for these girls, who might have been quite pleasant and attractive if they had ever for one moment been allowed to be natural and be themselves. I knew that I was with them because Mrs. Camberley wanted to please Lady Elspeth, and that but for that small fact she would not have dreamed of allowing them to speak to me.

Hugh was standing with his mother and sisters to receive the guests, and from the moment I arrived he devoted himself to me.

The dance was held in a pretty white and gold room overlooking the Thames, with a supper-room leading from it. There was a small orchestra, and there were about two hundred guests. Mostly they were young people, nearly all of them the county society in which Hugh's two blonde, pinkly-pretty sisters moved. Their talk was almost entirely of hunting and field sports, of friends and parties, and all of them looked at

me a little askance—the girls with curiosity, the men with desire.

At the Frivolity we girls nearly always played rich girls or aristocrats. Lady Betty or Lady Dora. Sometimes Lady Betty was pretending to be a poor girl, or the Duke she was in love with pretending to be a poor boy. These young men at Lady Elspeth's dance filled the stalls of the Frivolity nightly, clustered round the stage door, showered the girls with presents and pursued them with ardour. To them we girls, hand-picked for our looks by George Deward and trained to make the best of ourselves, were idealised society girls—what they would like the girls of their own set to look like, which they so rarely did. But to see the idealised, theatrical version of their dreams actually present among their own set, and vouched for by the Travers family, was something they had never imagined in their wildest dreams, and they stammered and hesitated, or they were flushed and bold, but wary-eyed as a herd of young bucks. They never took their eyes from me, and within the first fifteen minutes of introduction I could have filled my *carnet de bal* a hundred times.

I suppose, if I had any claims to being an actress, that little-season dance at the Hotel d'Anjou was the most successful performance of my life. It would have been very easy for me to over-play the part, to be the Belle of the Ball, with all the men chasing me and all the women hating me. But Lady Elspeth had given me my chance, and I took it. I was very charming and young, deferential to the older people, being as kind to the bores as to the charmers, dancing with as much delight with elderly and distinguished gentlemen as I did with the young and gay.

Hugh put his name down for every other dance, and after the supper waltz he took me down to the buffet, where I sat at his mother's table.

Lady Elspeth patted my hand, and said, 'You've done very well, my dear. It will be a change to have a beauty in the Travers family again.'

'They still have you, Lady Elspeth,' I said demurely.

She laughed and told me not to overact my part. I knew hat whether I would enjoy being Hugh's wife or not, any girl vith wit and character would enjoy being Lady Elspeth's daughter-in-law. She was such a rare person: cynical but kind, so sure of herself and her position that she had no petty snobbism but merely rather a grand and amusing certainty of ner worth.

When we rose to leave the supper-room I saw a society ournalist I knew quite well—Tom Statham. Thin and thirty-sh, with his eager eyes and shabby genteel manner he was lways in and out of the Frivolity Theatre trying to pick up craps of gossip for his newspaper. He stared at me with mazement, spoke deferentially to Lady Elspeth, then came cross to me, hot on the scent.

'I understand that you are here at Lady Elspeth Travers's nvitation, Miss Eves,' he said. 'May I take it that you and Mr. Travers are engaged?'

Hugh drew my hand through his arm and said proudly, 'If nd when Miss Eves consents to become my wife, our engage-nent will be announced in the usual way.'

The dancing ended just after midnight. The private suite of ooms where the dance was held was on the first floor, and a vide grand reception staircase ran down to the main hotel ntrance. Lady Elspeth's guests came out, the women fussing vith their wraps, the men running down to see if the carriages vere being called.

Mrs. Reginald Camberley was fulsomely and effusively hanking Lady Elspeth and Hugh, with the girls waiting patiently and the young son chasing around downstairs to find heir carriage, when I became aware of a disturbance on the tairs. Half-way down the stairs were some people who had been dining in one of the other private rooms on the first floor, nd at the sound of their loud voices everyone in our party urned.

And then I saw Sophie.

She was beautifully dressed in pale grey, with one of her big black restaurant hats, and some pale grey fox furs, and she was

quite drunk.

She was with Berman and a couple of smart young men whom I knew by sight, rich, idle and well-connected. They were all laughing loudly at her. She could not walk straight, and was clinging to the ornamental brass banisters, crying to the others to help her, half laughing, swearing like a fish-wife, making a complete exhibition of herself.

For a moment I could not believe it. I had heard her swear, I had seen her in raffish company, but I had never seen her drunk, or undignified, or not in command of herself or the situation. I heard a man behind me say, 'It's the Eves woman, she's going to the bad since Woodbourne threw her over.' And I looked round and saw that everyone on that wide first-floor landing was looking at me.

I saw the little glint in Mrs. Camberley's eyes, as she drew the two 'gels' back towards the ballroom, telling them not to look or listen, as though the scene would contaminate them. I saw Lady Elspeth's handsome face fill with exasperation and disgust. I felt Hugh's grasp on my arm tighten and knew that his fair, girlish face was scarlet with embarrassment, although he stood loyally by my side.

He said gruffly, 'You'd better come away, Rose. You don't want her to see you. Heaven knows what she might do.'

But I shook my arm free and went down to Sophie, pushing through the men who stood round her. I looked straight into Berman's bearded face and said, 'Will you help me, please, Mr. Berman,' and he looked suddenly sheepish and ashamed.

I turned to Sophie and smiled, because I loved her, and I could not bear that she should be humiliated before these people. I had forgotten everything that stood between us in that moment, I only knew I loved her, and that she was worth more to me than anyone there. I said, 'Come on, Sophie, it's time you went home.'

I took her arm in mine, and Berman shamefacedly took the other. We helped her down the stairs and led her across the crowded foyer and through the big glass doors to where Jakes stood with her carriage. I helped her in. She did not say a

word, but sat with her jewelled hand over her mouth, staring at me.

Berman said, 'I am zo sorry, Rose. I vill see her home, I promise I vill see her safely home.' And he got into the carriage with her, Jakes touched his hat to me and whipped up the horses, and they clattered away along the Strand.

I stood and found Hugh standing beside me, and went back into the hotel. Lady Elspeth stood waiting for me, but Mrs. Camberley was drawing her brood around her and murmuring something to the effect that no doubt Miss Eves would make other arrangements to get home. . . .

I went straight up to Hugh's mother.

'It's no use,' I said. 'I wouldn't be able to keep your conditions, Lady Elspeth, even if I promised. If I needed her or she needed me, we would go to each other, whatever she is and whatever she's done. We've meant too much to each other. We've gone through too much. She's my sister Sophie and I'll always love her. That's how it is. I'm sorry.'

Lady Elspeth took my hand, and held on to it, giving it a little shake and squeeze. 'You'll do,' she said gently. 'I'll make no more conditions, Rose.'

She turned with splendid indifference on the murmuring Mrs. Camberley, and said graciously, 'My dear Mrs. Camberley, please do not be in the least *dérangée*! Hugh and I will be delighted to drive Miss Eves home. . . . Come along, children.'

She turned round to her own daughters, who were only too obviously enjoying the whole thing, and with one arm through mine and the other through Hugh's, she swept us along like a Queen Swan followed by a trail of cygnets, down the grand staircase, smiling good-nights on her departing guests. I saw the society journalist bolting down the Strand towards Fleet Street as we drove past.

I woke up late the next day. Marjorie had already gone back to Cambridge. When I went into the kitchen to get myself some coffee, I found it full of flowers, and the cards with them

were all congratulating me on my engagement to Hugh and wishing us every happiness.

I took my coffee through to Aunt Flora's room.

She pushed her spectacles up on to her forehead and laid aside her work, and rose and said, 'I thought I'd better let you sleep on. You must have had a most exciting evening. And now let me add my congratulations to the rest. I do, most heartily, my dear, and wish you and your fiancé all possible success and happiness in life. It's a great position you will fill one day, but I am sure you will do it admirably.'

I said, 'Aunt Flora, what are you congratulating me upon?'

She said, startled, 'Why, on your engagement, of course, to Mr. Hugh Travers!' She peered at me anxiously with her kindly, short-sighted eyes. 'Have you seen the papers, my dear?'

She passed me the morning *Clarion*, on the front page of which my picture and Hugh's were prominently displayed with a three-quarter-column article about the dance and our engagement. Tom Statham had managed to catch the last edition. There was nothing in it, of course, about the scene with Sophie on the stairs.

'Well, are you or aren't you?' said Aunt Flora, a trifle crossly. 'I must say, my dear, that I do think that young women who play with men's affections do the Women's Cause *no* good. It seems to me a woman who bargains with her person, even in the most respectable circumstances, is turning back the pages of history to when women were no better than owned chattels.'

'Dear Aunt Flora, *please*!' I protested. I felt a bit unnerved. The world had engaged me to Hugh overnight, and it seemed the easiest thing to do what the world wanted. 'The position is just the same as it was before. Hugh asked me to marry him, and I refused him. He has asked me since, and I—I haven't decided yet. The only difference is that his family have accepted me, and I like his mother very much. The newspapers have jumped the gun, and put out a story without confirmation, that's all.'

'Yes, I'm afraid they always do.' Aunt Flora sat down again at the big typewriter, and looked thoughtfully at the article she was writing. It was called 'Women's Place in This Twentieth Century'. She sighed. 'It's still a very uncomfortable and lonely place for a woman on her own, Rose. One day something will happen to change it all, but until then it's hard for women. Especially a pretty woman, as your sister learned to her cost. I can't advise you to marry a man you don't love, that would be sinful and disastrous. But neither can I advise you not to marry a man you like and respect. Well, the best of luck anyway, my dear. Will you be in to lunch?'

I kissed her warmly. 'Thank you, Aunt Flo. No, I shan't be in—we've a late rehearsal call at eleven. I'll see you later this afternoon.'

It was the last week in October, fine but with a north-east wind that cut along the streets and brought the last of the leaves tumbling down in the squares, so that you could see the seed bobbles on the plane trees hanging like decorations on a Christmas tree. I put on a warm tweed suit, quite a cheap one, for it was the first thing I had ever bought for myself. All the things Sophie had bought me when we moved into the house in Bayswater were summer clothes or evening clothes. All very fine and fashionable, and unsuitable for my life in Bloomsbury and for walking each day to the theatre through the slummy lanes round Drury Lane and Clare Market. It was a brown and red tweed, and I had made myself a little red velvet toque which I fastened tightly with a veil against the wind.

At the theatre everyone was in a kerfuffle about the announcement of my engagement, and the girls wanted to have a hen-luncheon-party at a restaurant, and demanded to see my ring. George Deward was furious because I had not told him, and he hoped I was not going to leave before he had fixed for someone to take over my little part.

I told them that the newspaper article was premature, and that Tom Statham had got over-excited, and that I had no intention of leaving the cast as yet. I don't think anyone quite

believed me, but I remained firm and calm, and went in to rehearsal as though nothing out of the way had occurred.

We broke at one o'clock and Deward told us to be back at three. He knew most of his girls would have appointments, either for luncheon with their admirers, or at the hairdressers or costumiers.

When I went up into the dressing-room to put on my hat, the call-boy brought a note up from the stage door. I thought at first it must be from Hugh, though he had already sent me some flowers with a note hoping I would give him permission to confirm the newspaper story. But I did not know the writing at all. I opened it carelessly—at the theatre we were always getting notes and invitations from every kind of person.

It was from Brendan.

It said briefly that he was down at the stage door, and he hoped I would see him.

For a few seconds I did not know what to do. I moved in an involuntary rush to the door as though I would fly down to his arms—and then I remembered everything.

I sat down quickly and my knees began to tremble. I decided to send down to say I could not see him, then knew at once that I *had* to see him. This might be the last time I should ever see him. I had nothing of him at all. Not a photograph, nothing but this rather formal little note in my hand. I had a brief and sentimental picture of myself as a very old woman, married to Hugh, with this scrap of paper hidden away in my jewel-case, and I immediately jumped to my feet. Whatever I did I was not going to be a sentimental idiot.

I had thought I had stopped feeling about Brendan and that I had got myself and my life well in hand. But now, in a few minutes, I had learned that this was not true. I knew I loved him and had been starved for the sight of him all through that summer. He was in love with Sophie and he was going to take her with him out of England. Very well. I could face that. I could face my loss, building a new life for myself and marrying Hugh. Those things were in the future. But at this moment Brendan was downstairs waiting and I was going down to see

him because if I did not I might never see him again.

I told the boy to ask Mr. Brady to wait. I carefully smoothed my hair, touched my lips with salve so they would not dry in the cold wind, put on my hat and tied my veil. Then I went downstairs.

He was outside in the bright sunlight, and I looked through the glass portholes in the stage door, seeing him before he saw me. He stood braced against the wind, with that sinewy horseman's stance, hands thrust into the pockets of his short overcoat, his fawn derby tipped over one eye as jauntily as ever. I don't know why I had expected him to have changed. He was just the same. Tall, good-looking, with that touch of exciting swagger about him that made all women turn and look at him. Some of the girls did so now, and he met their glance with a smile, tipping his hat. I thought of Sophie's words, 'Brendan's a real man, simple and kind, and strong, and brave, and passionate.' But also he was a natural man, with no corners, no vanities, no attitudes, and because of this he made you feel good. With Brendan it was easy for people to be happy, because there was no need to be anything but yourself.

He caught my face peeping through the glass, and raised his hat, and smiled, and opened the door for me. If he remembered the horror and terror, the dark passion and disaster, of our last meeting, he did not show it at all. He was just the Brendan I had always known.

'Rose,' he said. 'I read about you and Hugh Travers in the paper this morning, so I've come to wish you well. I do wish you well, and all happiness, and I hope it's really what you want.'

'Thank you,' I said faintly.

'And another thing. Do you remember once—it seems so long ago, but it was only back in the spring -you asked me to promise not to go away without saying goodbye?'

'I remember,' I said, feeling the colour come to my cheeks. Indeed I remembered. I remembered what a child I had been then, and how I had worn my heart on my sleeve for him to see.

'Well, by the end of next month I'll be sailing to Australia. I'm going on the *Adelaide* from Liverpool on the thirtieth of November.'

'I haven't seen you for a long while, so I can't say I'll miss you,' I said. He was going with Sophie, so I could not tell him of the sudden and awful pain in my heart. We were walking aimlessly, side by side. I realised how tall he was compared to Hugh.

He stopped and turned me to face him, and said, 'He's a lucky fellow, for sure, Rose. And if I hear out in Australia that he's not treated you fine, I'll come back and beat the living daylights out of him.'

He smiled, but his eyes did not smile, and I realised that all this light banter was not really what he wanted to say. Suddenly he said:

'Rose, he's having you for the rest of his life. He won't be missing you for an hour. Come and have lunch with me, Rosie. We may never meet again.'

I could not refuse him—I would not. And I would not talk about Sophie, nor about Hugh. I was not promised to Hugh yet, and if Sophie had stolen everything from me, at least I could steal this little harmless hour from her.

We walked down to Gattis at Charling Cross and got a table. I can't remember what we ordered, only the taste of Chianti, rich and sweet in my mouth, and there were some carnations on the table, and I took one and played nervously with it until the stalk broke and he took it from me and put it in his buttonhole and pinned it there carefully.

He told me he would be with Mr. Vestry until the end of the month, and that Cornucopia had improved greatly and was running at Newmarket the following week. Mr. Vestry had a new man, but Brendan had promised to stay until the last moment. He told me that he had work in Australia and was going straight out to a stable near Melbourne where some of the best horses in the Australian continent were trained.

'I've been given a cottage there,' he said, and he looked at me suddenly and shook his head. 'That will seem funny to you,

Rose. You'll be having a town house, and a big place in the country.' He smiled, but neither of us ate and the food went cold on our plates. 'Maybe one day when you're Lady Woodbourne you'll own a string of thoroughbreds, and I'll come back here and train them for you.'

I did not answer, and he said, 'I'm only fooling. I shall never come back. This country will hold nothing for me.'

I can remember how empty all our conversation was. How pleasant and meaningless. And how aware I was of him. I could not ask him any of the things I wanted to know. If he had ever cared for me. When he had first loved Sophie.

The hour went slowly, with longer and longer silences, and then he called for the bill, and he went out, and he called a cab outside the Golden Cross, and drove me back to the theatre.

In the cab, I said, stupidly, just for something to say, 'So you sail at the end of next month,' and he said, 'Yes—if Dan is out. If not, I'll have to postpone it.'

Startled, I said, 'Have you seen him?'

'No. He wouldn't see me. I got an interview with the Governor, who told me he was being very quiet, a model prisoner, trying to get a good-conduct release—they gave him an extra month for the breakout, you know. They say he should get some weeks off. But it's queer, somehow—not like Dan. When he wouldn't see me, I got that fellow who used to manage for him at Drovny Street—the Italian, I don't know if you remember. I got hold of him and asked him to go and see Dan, and he says he *is* very quiet. He said it was uncanny. He said he didn't think Dan was quite right in his head. That he answered questions all right, but he seemed away somewhere, and it was queer and a bit scaring. Well, I'll see when he comes out.'

'You want to see him?' I said. 'Before you go?'

The cab had pulled up outside the stage door, and the girls were going in to the afternoon rehearsal, huddling their bright faces into their furs against the cold wind.

'I want him to come with me,' he said.

'You *what*?'

'I want him to come with me. He could start a new life out there. He knows horses too—he's tough, is Dan, and he's not much over forty. Give him a chance to forget.'

'But Sophie!' I said. 'What about Sophie?'

He added grimly: 'What has Sophie got to do with us now?'

He put out his arms and drew me against him, and kissed me, kissing my mouth as he had kissed me that first time in the woods above the Downs, his lips moving across mine, across my cheeks and throat. He said, with the little lilt of a brogue that sometimes sounded in his voice, 'Ah, sure and he'll never miss that one kiss, Rosie, my darling, that man of yours, for he'll have you for a lifetime, and this'll have to last me for the rest of my days.'

He leaned across, opened the cab door, and lifted me out on to the pavement.

'Brendan!' I said. '*Brendan!* Isn't Sophie going to Australia with you?'

'Sophie?' he said bleakly. 'What gave you that notion? One of the reasons I'm going and taking Dan with me, *if* he'll come, is to get him away from her. She's nearly destroyed him. She's done enough harm to me and mine.'

He got back into the cab and drove off, leaving me there in utter bewilderment, not knowing what to think, or what to believe. Was Sophie deliberately lying to me? Had she been deceiving herself?

I went into the theatre like someone in a dream, and worked through the afternoon. About four Deward finished rehearsing and I was free to go, and I got a cab back to Bloomsbury.

As the cab drew up I saw Sophie's smart little carriage standing outside the house, with Jakes at the horse's head. I paid off my driver and came up to Jakes, and he touched his hat to me.

'Is Mrs. Brady here?' I asked.

'She's inside, Miss Eves. She's been waiting some time.'

I went up the stairs to the first floor and let myself in with my key. I knew that Aunt Flora would not be in.

Sophie was in the drawing-room, reading one of Aunt Flora's pamphlets. She looked up as I came in. She was pale, beautifully dressed in a dark tailor-made suit, with a toque of red cock plumes, and a sable stole and muff. Her scent seemed to fill the untidy room.

She touched the pamphlet with her little gloved hand. 'They've got a likely hope, these women!' she said. 'Do they really think men will give them all these things? They'll have to fight for it every inch of the way.'

'They're prepared to do that.' I came forward. 'How did you get in, Sophie?'

'Miss Morrison let me in. She was just going out and said I could wait for you. Rose, thank you for last night!'

'It was nothing.'

'It was a great deal. Don't think I don't know.'

She picked up the newspaper which lay on Aunt Flora's desk, and said, 'And little Hugh still wants to marry you? He's got more pluck than I thought. And his lady mother accepts you too? You're a clever little thing, young Rose. It seems you're all set to be the future Lady Woodbourne.'

'Except that I haven't accepted him yet,' I said quietly.

She looked across at me, and I said:

'Sophie. Brendan came to see me today at the theatre, to tell me he is going to Australia at the end of next month. But he said he was taking Dan with him, not you.'

She stood looking at me, the colour draining slowly from her cheeks. She put out a hand blindly, seeking some support, and I went to her and guided her to a chair. She sat down and she was shaking visibly.

'Rose—say what you said again.'

'Brendan said that he's taking Dan with him to Australia. That's why he booked the other passage. Not for you. For Dan. To take him away when he comes out of prison, to start a new life far away from you.'

She said quietly, 'Of course. Of course. For Dan. My God, what a fool a woman can be when she's in love!'

She suddenly burst into a passion of tears. I went to her,

and we put our arms round each other and she was crying against me, her slim lithe body shaking painfully. I had never seen her weep before, and it seemed as though she was crying away all the unshed tears of her life.

We sat down on the settee, and I took off her hat and got her some tea, and at last the shuddering sobs grew quieter.

'I built it up,' she said, 'a house of lies like a house of cards. Lie upon lie to make myself believe it. I tried to keep him from you, Rose, because I was jealous. Oh, I thought Hugh was the better match. But that was never the real truth of it. The truth was I wanted Brendan, from the first time—d'you remember, when we went to the Old Wellington Music Hall and I told Dan I'd marry him? You were only a nipper then. Perhaps if I'd had more guts, and gone on singing, and not married Dan—perhaps then, Brendan would have looked at me. He liked me then, I know. But I always had the wrong sort of courage—or let's say, I had courage for the wrong things. So I dreamed of Brendan, all the time I was with Dan, driving him crazy with jealousy, poor devil ... all the time with Woodbourne, until it became too strong for me. That night, Rose, when Dan found us together, Brendan only came because he thought that Dan would murder Woodbourne or me but that he would never touch him. He thought I was a crooked, cold-hearted woman, and maybe he was right, though Christ knows if he'd touched my hand once I would have shown him different. Then I thought, if you married Hugh Travers, Brendan would give you up and turn to me ... and when Mrs. Vestry told me about the two passages to Australia, I didn't think of Dan ... it was just something to dream about.'

'But why didn't Brendan tell me at once?' I asked. 'Why didn't he come and see me? I'm not a fool or a child. I would have understood.'

'For God's sake, Rosie,' she said in the old sharp way, 'use your brains. Brendan's only got himself, a broken brother and the price of a passage to Australia. You'd just told him you were going to marry one of the richest young men in England.

What the devil had he to offer you to compare with that?'

'I wouldn't have even thought of Hugh if I had known that Brendan wanted me.'

She picked up her pretty hat and began to put it on before a mirror, tucking in an invisible hairpin to hold a stray wave, dabbing away the signs of tears with her handkerchief, smoothing her skin with a little rice paper, touching her lips with salve.

'Well, you'd better tell him, hadn't you?' she said. 'Brendan, I mean. I always said that a woman's life depends on the sort of man she gets. Well, Brendan Brady is your man, young Rose. I didn't think of it that way before. I thought of money, position, all those things. But Brendan has always wanted you, ever since you grew up. He's your man. If you want him, don't let him go.'

She began to pull on her fine little gloves, shaping them to her hands. 'Brendan or Hugh Travers,' she said lightly, 'whichever it is, our lives would go separate ways, Rosie. They both think I'm a wrong 'un, and they're right. So whether you decide to be Mrs. Hugh or Mrs. Brendan, it doesn't look as though our ways will cross.'

She moved to the door with her lithe, elegant walk, and I could smell the scent and feel the richness of her. She turned suddenly, and held me tightly, and said:

'It doesn't matter. But don't forget we're sisters, and I love you, Rose. That's all.'

'What will you do?'

'Well, I've had the telephone put into the house. That's something new, isn't it? And I shall go home now, and I shall telephone Woodbourne at his club, and say "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey".' She laughed the same cool, hard little laugh that I always remembered. 'It's what I should have done in the first place. With Woodbourne's sort I know where I am and how to manage my life. If I'd stuck to him, none of this—this foolishness—would have happened. Goodbye, my darling.'

She went out taking a bit of my heart with her. She had

opened a door on a new hope for me, and closed it firmly on her own. I knew she was right. Brendan was my man, and I was not going to let him go. First thing tomorrow, I would go to Epsom to find him but tonight, after the show, I must also tell Hugh that I could not marry him.

Hugh was sad, and I was sad, because I had grown to care for him in a curious sisterly way. When he called for me after the show, I made him drive me to his mother's home to tell her too. I was glad I had never accepted him, because then his pride would have been involved. As it was, the silly story that Tom Statham had spread over the newspapers would be forgotten in a few days.

Lady Elspeth said, 'Going out to Australia with a penniless Irishman to breed and train racehorses?'

'If he'll have me,' I said.

'He'll have you,' she said in her brisk manner. 'I'm disappointed you're not having Hugh, though. Of course, you're quite right to follow your heart. I envy you, you know, Rose. I'd stop either of my girls doing anything so mad, but I must say I wish they were the sort that wanted to do such things. You *young* women—you're on a threshold, you know. Me, and Aunt Flora Morrison—we've just *seen* that things could be different for women. You'll see it further—but by the end of this new century, when your great-grandchildren are grown up, there'll be a twentieth-century woman. A completely different woman. Then men will have to look out! They'll have to be so good if they're going to be better than *those* women and keep them in their places!' She laughed her infectious laugh. 'I wish I could live to see it!' she said.

That next morning was like the morning when I had played truant from school and caught the early train out to Epsom, except now it was autumn, and then it had been spring, and then I had worn muslin, and now I was warm in tweed.

I knocked at about the same hour, when the string had been brought back from the morning exercise and Mr. and Mrs. Vestry and Brendan were having their breakfast. Again Mrs.

Vestry came to the door, and stared when she saw me. She told me to come in, but I shook my head, and said, 'Tell Brendan I'm here, please,' and she clapped her hand over her mouth to silence her delighted laughter, and went to tell him.

He came to the door, and stared at me.

'I've come to tell you,' I said, 'I'm not going to marry Hugh Travers.'

'Why?'

'Because I want to marry you,' I said, and I went scarlet, but went on firmly, neck or nothing. If he does not want me now, I thought, I shall die. 'I thought you were in love with Sophie—that's why I told you I was going to marry Hugh.'

He still stood there, so I tightened up my courage, suddenly needing it all, and asked:

'Are you in love with her, Brendan?'

He shook his head, as though he could not find his voice, and put a hand out to hold mine.

'Give me a minute,' he said. 'Give me a minute to get my breath. You've fairly winded me, young Rose.'

He drew me against him, putting his arm round me.

'No, I don't love her. There was a time—when we were youngsters, I was about eighteen and she was singing round the pubs, and Dan was so crazy about her—when I thought she was wonderful. So full of guts, so cocky and independent, taking care of you and old Min all on her own. Then she married Dan and I learned how tough she was for all her pretty ways. And how sharp she was about money, not caring who she hurt to get her hands on it. And how cruel she was with Dan. Sure, he's tough, but he loved her so much it was like hitting a baby. I watched her hurt him so that he had no spirit left, and as she did it she killed everything I felt for her, bit by bit. Except to admire her courage. I had to give her that, though in the end I didn't even respect her. Then you grew up, Rosie, and you were like Sophie, except that you're good. Good-hearted. Kind and generous and a real little woman. How d'you think I've been feeling all this time, thinking you'd be Lady Muck, and me with the devil a bit of nothing to

offer you?'

'I don't care what you've been feeling,' I said in a stifled voice. 'All I care about is how you feel now. I love you, Brendan Brady, and if you love me, for mercy's sake say so and put me out of my misery.'

He picked me up in his arms and swung me off my feet, and my hair promptly fell down as it always seemed to when he kissed me.

'Love you?' he said. 'Of course I love you, I'm off my head about you, Rose, and always have been.'

When he kissed me I knew then that it was all right. That life was going to be all right, and love was going to be all right between us. I remember hazily that I was praying that I might make him as good a woman as Sophie might have done if things had been different.

The next weeks were a scramble. A scramble to give my notice in, to get married, get a trousseau and to get a passage on the *Adelaide*. Afterwards I thought perhaps if Brendan and I had not been so blindingly, selfishly in love, the horror that came afterwards might not have happened. But we were. We were living in that blaze of light which follows the discovery of mutual love; and we were also occupied with ordinary material things, for Brendan was working with Mr. Vestry until the last moment, and I could not leave the theatre in under a fortnight, when George Deward had found someone to take my place.

I had arranged, the moment I finished at the theatre, to move down to the Vestrys', and we were to be married at the pretty old church at Headley near-by, for the Vestrys' stable was in that parish. There were innumerable details to arrange.

I telephoned Sophie—I did not know whether she would want to come to my wedding or not, and she did not promise. She would see, she said. She did not tell me much about herself, but I heard through the grapevine of dressing-room gossip that she was going about with Woodbourne, and appeared, at any rate, to have recovered her former splendour and poise. She sent me a cheque for a present, and I was grateful, for we

had little money between us, and it had taken Brendan all his time to raise the money for the extra passage.

Our greatest anxiety was Dan. Prisons do not let relatives know when a man is going to be released. The small door in the big one is just opened one day, usually in the early dawn, and he comes home, if he has a home, and arrives with broken nails and his prison pallor, for better or worse—and tragically often for the worse. We knew that Dan was to be released, but we did not know when, and he had refused to see Brendan. Writing was no use, because—and it was only now that I learned this—Dan could neither read nor write. Enormously strong, as a boy he had made money prize-fighting, and when his parents died he had taken care of Brendan, paying for schooling for him that he had never had himself. All his money had been sucked into the gambling-house in Drovny Street. So that day, which was to be Brendan's last day at an English race-course, we did not even know that Dan had been released, and, crazed and ignorant of everything outside his own abysmal unhappiness, was again following Sophie with murder in his heart.

The racing was at Newmarket, and Cornucopia was entered for the Cambridgeshire. I went down with the Vestrys by train. Brendan had travelled down with the horse the day before. In spite of its being early November, it was a fine day, not even very cold—one of those moist, springlike days that come occasionally in the fall of the year, when there almost seems a smell of violets in the air. I wore a violet-coloured suit, and a muff and toque of grey squirrel which had been Mrs. Vestry's wedding present to me, and there was a lovely holiday feeling about the whole excursion, for we had all been working hard, and it was a day off for all of us. And it was perhaps something a little deeper for Mr. Vestry and Brendan, for they had worked well and hard together now for some years, and this was the end of their association, and they were hoping to crown it with a success for Lord Woodbourne's horse that afternoon.

I saw Sophie first when we arrived at Newmarket Station.

We got out lower down the platform, but Lord Woodbourne had reserved two or three compartments in the first class for his party, as was his custom. Walking between Mr. and Mrs. Vestry it was like looking through a window back on to a previous existence, to see all these fine fast ladies and gentlemen emerging from the train, so fashionable, so expensive, all laughing and chattering together as they made their way out to where the carriages were waiting to drive them to the course. And in the middle of them, as I had always known her, queen of this smart sporting society, was Sophie, beautifully groomed and dressed, Lord Woodbourne by her side, surrounded as always by a retinue of smart men-about-town. She saw me, and her face changed a little, and she came straight across and kissed me. I thanked her for her cheque.

'When do you sail?'

'The thirtieth—we hope.'

'And—the wedding?'

'Next Monday—at Headley, at eleven o'clock. Mrs. Vestry is giving a small luncheon party at her house. Sophie—*try* to come?' I could feel my lips trembling. 'Sophie, I know you may not want to, and I shall understand. But—Brendan and I don't seem to have any families . . . you're all mine, you know.'

'And Dan is all his,' she said slowly. 'Poor Dan. I'll see, Rosie.' She gave a little mocking smile. 'It depends what his lordship is doing. We're staying down here with a house party for the three days' racing, but I suppose you will go back tomorrow.'

'Yes.'

'Well! I'll see!'

Woodbourne was calling her impatiently, so she patted my cheek and sailed off towards him. He helped her into the carriage, and in a moment they were off. As the carriage turned in the station approach she looked round and waved to me. Mr. Vestry came bustling and calling us. He had managed to secure a cab. We followed him among the stream of people and at that moment, I saw Dan.

He had been watching Sophie leave the station. He looked

thin and white, and was dressed in the rough dark clothes he had worn that terrible night at Bayswater, the sort of rough clothes seamen buy at ships'-chandlers. He stood quite motionless in the seething crowd of race-goers, watching the carriage move off; and then, without looking to left or to right, he moved forward with the stream of people and I lost sight of him.

I was frantic. All the terror of that night when he had gone to our house in Bayswater came back. But there was nothing I could do, until I saw Brendan. We went straight to the saddling enclosure, and as Brendan came forward to kiss me I told him quickly.

'You're sure?' he said. 'You're *sure* it was Dan?'

'Positive.'

'He must have been released early this morning and has been watching Sophie and followed her here. We must warn her, Rose. God alone knows what he's thinking about. Her and me, or her and Woodbourne. Rose—you go and try to see her, or get a message to her. I'll try to find Dan, *if* I can!'

He spoke to Mr. Vestry, who stayed with the horse and the boy while Brendan plunged among the crowd.

Sophie would be in the Members Enclosure, and Dan could not get in there. So long as she remained inside, she would be all right. But she might leave at any moment. To place a cash bet in Tattersalls, to walk down to the paddock, or to see Cornucopia saddled. I could not get into the Members either, and there was more than one exit from which she could leave.

The first race came and went, and I had not seen her, or Lord Woodbourne, or Dan, and neither had Brendan. He came back and took the horse down to the paddock, and Mr. Vestry went with him. Mrs. Vestry went down with me. Sophie had not come to the paddock, but Lord Woodbourne was there, and Brendan spoke to him, and I saw his face darken angrily, and I saw him stare at Brendan with his arrogant look before he turned to go back to the stands.

Brendan came over to us. 'I told him to keep her in Members,' he said, 'until I find Dan. He'll call the police, of course.

If I could see Dan, just for a minute, and talk to him, it might make all the difference. Unless I do find him, his lordship will have him arrested. And if I don't find him, and he isn't arrested, God alone knows what crazy thing he'll do!'

'We *must* find him,' I said desperately, 'we *must*.'

The race started, and Cornucopia won. It must have been the only time in his life that Brendan has not watched a horse racing when he has trained and worked with it. He went down to lead it back, and as he led it into the enclosure, I saw Dan.

I saw him, and Sophie saw him too. I had been running to get back to Brendan, because I was terribly afraid for him, but Sophie had come to see the horse, walking among her entourage of young men, with Berman on one side of her, and Woodbourne, his face drawn with anger and apprehension on the other. I learned afterwards that he had warned her and told her to stay where she was until Dan was apprehended and that she had just laughed at him. Afterwards I wondered about this. She had always been fearless for herself, but perhaps it was what she wanted. I don't know. All I know is that as I came up, Brendan led the horse Cornucopia in, and as he did, I saw Dan quite near him in the crowd. I saw him raise his hand with the gun pointed at Brendan, and I screamed, and as I screamed Sophie sprang forward and there was the sound of a shot, and Brendan was hanging on to the big horse as it plunged and kicked among the crowd, and Sophie lay on the grass, her pretty hat rolling under the horse's hooves.

I sprang towards her, lifting her in my arms, cradling her head on my shoulder, her fair hair falling loose all about us. Just below her right breast was a neat little singed hole in the smooth green cloth of her dress, and her lips were frothed with blood.

Mr. Vestry and the lad had led away the horse and Brendan was kneeling beside us. He said. 'Don't move her, Rose—for God's sake don't move her!'

He looked up into the staring faces around and shouted, 'Get a doctor, get a doctor quickly! A doctor and a stretcher!'

I saw Berman rush off in search of a doctor. Woodbourne stood near, frozen with horror. And then I saw Dan.

He came slowly forward, and no one seemed to think of holding him, everyone seemed shocked into immobility, or else they did not realise what had happened. He came until he was standing over her, his right hand in his pocket.

She looked up. I wiped the blood from her lips, and she smiled like a child up at him, and said, 'Poor Dan. Forgive me ...?'—and his iron face seemed to crumple. She turned her face up to me, still with that strange sweet smile.

The years were falling away from her, and she looked young again—young as she had been before my mother had died, before André, before our father had set her to sing for her living round the public houses and free-and-easies. She raised her hand and touched my face, her eyes full of love, and said, 'It doesn't look as if I'll be coming to the wedding, young Rose.' Then, suddenly, there was a bright red flood, staining my hands and dress, and she fell forward across me, and Brendan took her from me and she died there in his arms where she would have wished to die.

I did not faint or anything, because we Eves girls are tough. I can only remember standing there numbly, dead with grief, thinking I must cry or else I should not be able to bear the pain any longer. I was conscious of the hysterical voices of the crowd, and Sophie lying on the grass, of Brendan taking off his coat to cover her lovely face, and of Lord Woodbourne standing there with the tears raining down his hard dark face, quite unconscious that he was crying in public like a child. And I was conscious of Dan turning away and walking off among the crowd, and their realisation that the murderer had gone away under their eyes. But, of course, he was dead when they found him. Poor Dan.

It was a sad wedding, with many tears, a little laughter, but we were together, and we loved each other. And when the *Adelaide* sailed we were glad we were going away to a new country, leaving all the sadness behind, starting again, a new life and a new country.

Well, it's some years ago now, and I'm living here on this great grassland, and I wake in the morning to the stamp of hooves and the clank of pails, and the shouts of the boys as they get the string out for the morning exercise. Brendan is a trainer in his own right now. An owner for whom he had considerable success lent him the money to start, and with his gift for 'picking a good 'un' and his Irish passion for horses, he is making a success of it.

Marjorie is married, and has given up militancy now that Arthur is standing for Parliament; and, as he says, thank goodness Aunt Flora is too old for that kind of lark, especially since they have taken to chaining themselves to railings. Hugh married this year. I hear from his mother occasionally, and she still seems to regret not having me as a daughter-in-law. Aunt Min came out here to us—Lord Woodbourne paid her fare, and pays her a pension. She is over seventy now, and never stops grumbling, but she still cooks for us as gloriously as ever.

I am happy here in Australia. I like the freeness, the life which says a man is as good as he can be and not as good as his birth can make him. I am happy because I am with my love, and he loves me. We have a child, a girl, Sophia. It's not sentimentality—or perhaps it is—that we named her so. I don't know. It's just that we feel if we can bring her up to be as brave and kind as the other Sophie, but good and honest as well, we shall have compensated a little for the waste of that other young life. There will be another baby this spring, and I guess if it's a boy we'll call it Dan.

My sister Sophie. She was good and she was bad, she was strong and weak, kind and cruel, and generous to me, sister and mother, doing what she could according to her nature and her circumstances, and I loved her, and I shall miss her as long as I live.

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